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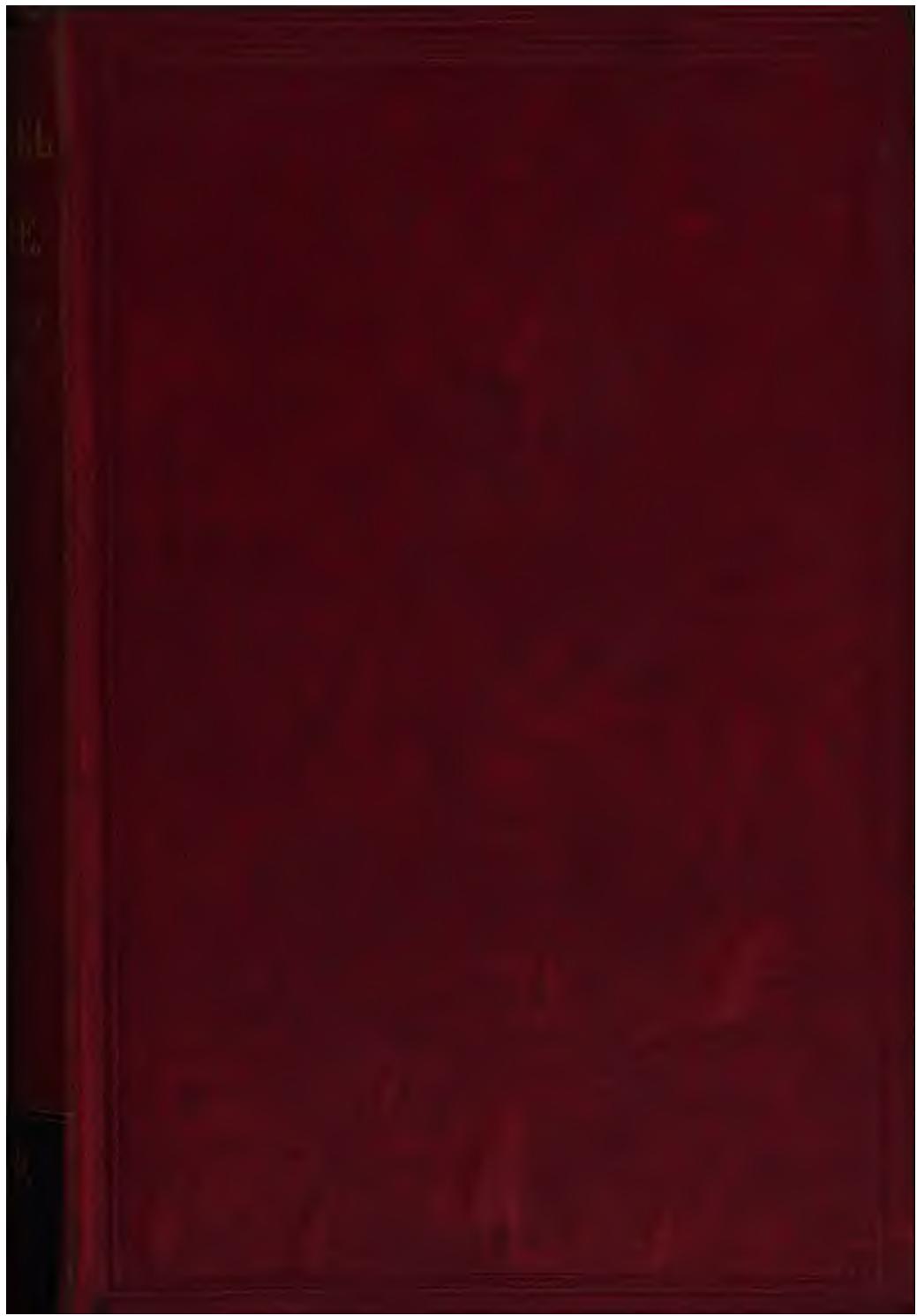
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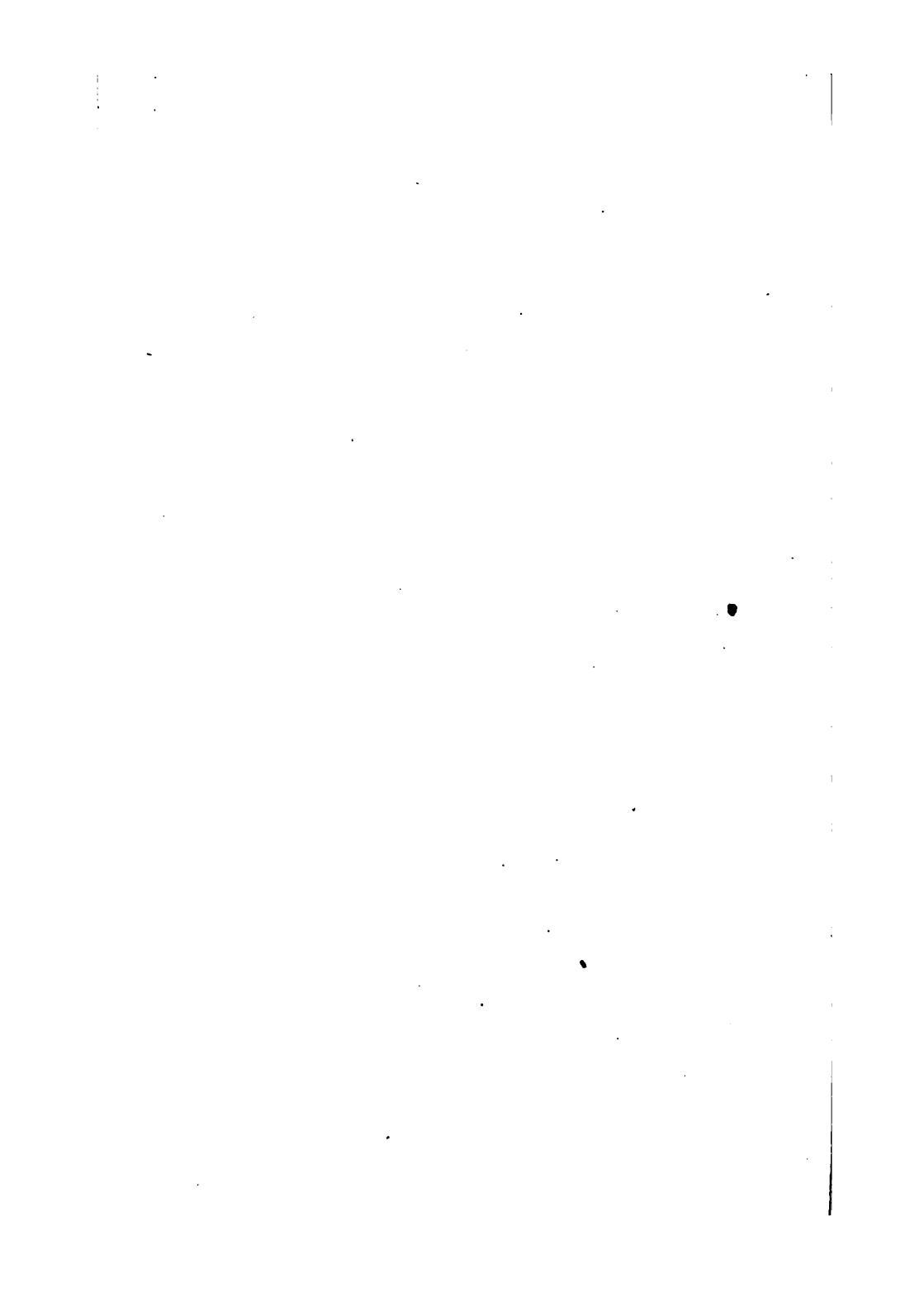
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COLONEL DACRE.

VOL. I.



COLONEL DACRE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“CASTE,” “MY SON’S WIFE,” “PEARL,”

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.



LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1874.

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251. b. 20.

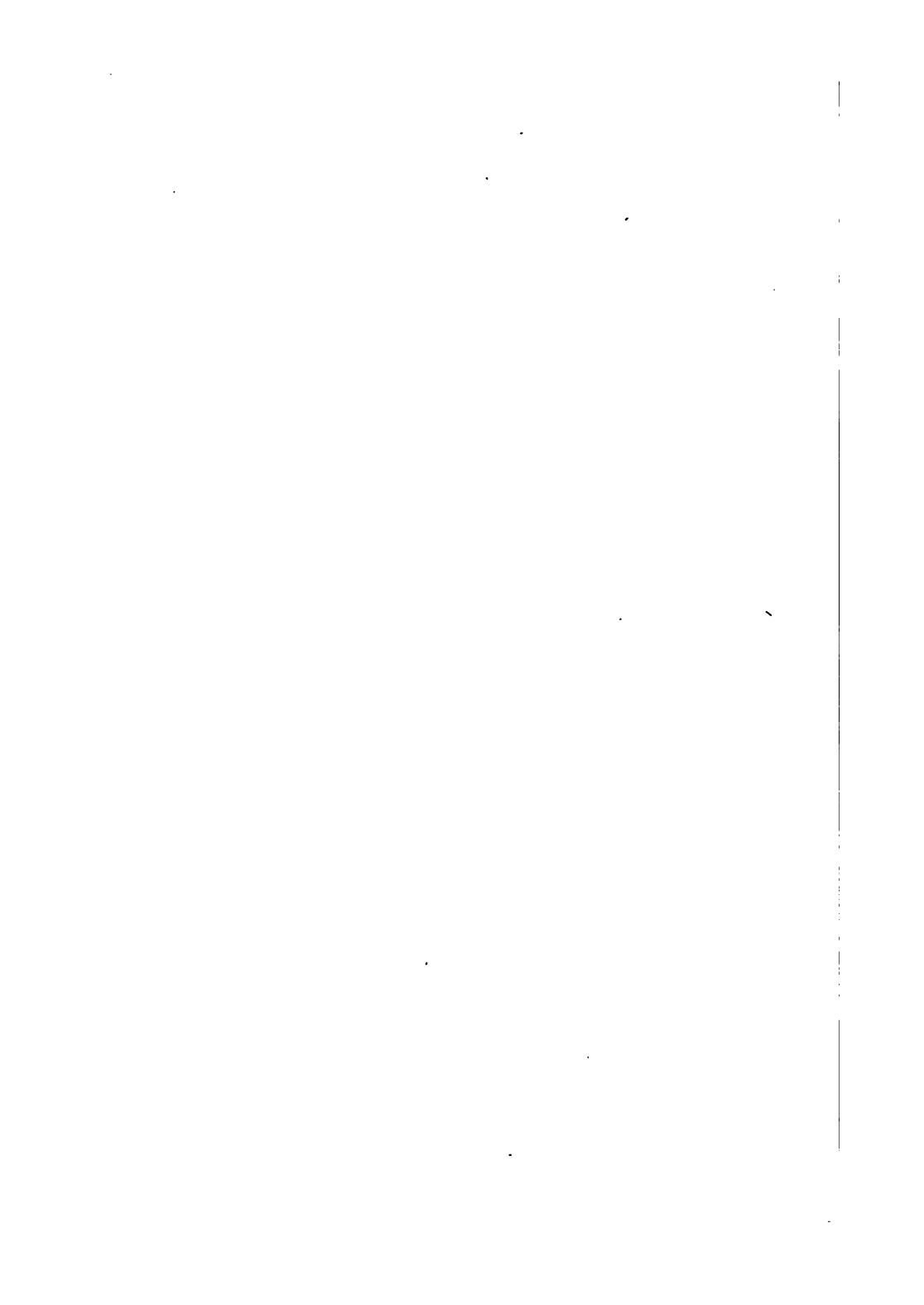
LONDON:
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL,
BLENHEIM HOUSE.

BOOK I

AUTUMN.

VOL. I.

B



COLONEL DACRE.

CHAPTER I.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

“ Is her love still
Upon the growing hand? Does it not stop
And wither at my years? Has she not view'd
And entertained some younger, smooth behaviour,
Some youth but in his blossom, as herself is?”

A THREE-DAYS-OLD October moon
was just setting behind the larch-wood
fringing the far edge of a lately-ploughed,
chocolate-coloured field on his right
hand, as Colonel Dacre drew near the gates
of the home-avenue. It was a tenderly-pathetic
evening. Along the base of the
sky were grand lines of cloud; above these
a clear heaven, giving promise of slight
autumnal frost. Under the lines of cloud

were sweeping undulations of hill, sparsely dotted with lights from wide-lying upland farms. Between the road along which Colonel Dacre was being driven, and the scene at which he gazed across, was a deep, gorge-like valley, already full of mist, through which, here and there, twinkled the lighted casements of unseen cottages. As the lights had begun to shine on the hill-sides and in the valley, the stars began to show palely in the sky.

The carriage turned an abrupt corner of the road, and a few minutes after Colonel Dacre was within his own gates. From thence a drive of half-a-mile, heathery banked and fir-shaded, brought him to his own door.

The door stood wide, showing a warm, ruddy glow from logs burning on the hearth, which seemed to bring the dark browns and dim crimsons of the interior

into pleasant harmony with the only half-seen gorgeous colouring of larch and birch, of beech and oak, of maple and wild cherry, held in solution by the October twilight outside.

At the sound of the carriage wheels upon the drive had arisen a great barking of dogs, bringing Miss Dacre into the hall. Her brother's arm was soon round her ; he held her lovingly, and gave her close and warm kisses ; but, even as he did so, his eyes searched beyond her, seeking some else. The carriage had driven round to the back of the house directly Colonel Dacre had sprung out of it.

“ Where are the others ? ” he questioned, after a few moments.

“ You mean, ‘ Where is Alice ? ’ ” was answered mischievously.

“ Alice and Grace ; but, of course, chiefly Alice.”

“ And where she is exactly, I can’t tell you—but not far off, I’m sure. We half expected you yesterday, brother. When you failed us yesterday, we expected you quite early this morning. Alice hardly slept last night, and has been wandering and watching all day. So you mustn’t be disappointed if she looks fagged and pale.”

“ But where do you think she is now ?”

“ I thought she might have meant to meet you at the gate.”

“ I don’t think she was likely to intend to do that.”

“ Perhaps not. Anyway, she can’t be far off. The dogs will announce you to her, and she will soon appear. You must be cold and hungry. Let us shut the hall-door and go in.”

“ Let the door stay open, if there is any chance that Alice is still out ! But should she be out so late, Olivia ? The evenings are

cold and damp now. The mists lie thick in the valley."

"You know, Walter, what a little out-door creature she is ; with always some pretty excuse of moon-rise or sun-set, of twilight or starlight, or bird's song or flower scent, for postponing what she feels the evil hour of finally coming indoors."

"Not changed in that, then!"

"Not in that, nor in anything ; unless to grow sweeter, brighter, better."

The brother's eyes eloquently thanked the sister for those words. Then he went from the hall to the porch, from the porch to the drive, and looked to the right and to the left. No one was in sight.

"If I try to find her, I shall probably miss her," he said ; "so I will wait till she finds me."

And he allowed Olivia, her hand passed through his arm, to lead him into one of

the rooms, which opened on the hall.

“No changes here, I hope?” he exclaimed, looking round him on the noble room, where everything was toned down to a dim richness by years of use.

“No change in anything, except such as time will make in spite of us.”

They stood together on the rug, before the bright wood-fire, and looked at each other.

“Well, Olivia, and what have you to tell me? Surely a world of things.”

Colonel Dacre’s keen, bright eyes looked self-amused as he said this, and a glow of colour, that might have been called a blush, came into his bronzed face.

“Yes, a world of things—and yet hardly anything that you do not know, or would not be able to find out, without a word from me. As to my chief charges, Grace and Alice, I have but one source of

discontent with Grace—that she is too entirely self-contented. As to Alice, it is dangerous that I should begin to speak."

"No fear of wearying your present listener."

"But I have written everything in my letters."

"I am ready to hear everything again from your lips."

"Foolish fellow!"

"That is it, Olivia—an old fool is the worst of fools, and I am——"

"Not a fool for loving my Alice?"

"Not for loving her—God bless her! But how about expecting her to love me? In this I am, perhaps, a fool."

Olivia smiled, so secure and happy a smile that her brother's eyes moistened as he drank it in. "My good sister—my good, kind, unselfish Olivia!" he said softly.

This brother and sister were strangely

alike. She was ten or fifteen years the elder, and a very remarkable-looking woman. She was very dark, but her skin was smooth and clear, and let the blood speak through it eloquently; her dark eyes burnt with an almost over-eager brightness and enthusiasm, but theirs was generous enthusiasm, and their brightness was genial and kindly. The hair which framed the Velasquez sort of face was very abundant, soft and shining, but snow-white. She wore a bit of rich white lace pinned over it with opal pins, and this gave her a pleasing look of matronhood. She was tall and well-formed, both strong and graceful looking. Her dress, of a rich goldy-brown velvet, relieved with a touch of crimson at the throat, so became her that, seeing her thus dressed, one could not imagine her dressed otherwise. In her youth Miss Dacre had been nothing

like so delightful to look upon as she was now. It had needed the experiences she had gone through to harmonize and mellow her nature. There had been something of fierceness in her fire, of bigotry in her enthusiasm ; she had been turbulently passionate. If there was repose about her now, it had been won by hard fighting, and after many wounds. Miss Dacre's one feature of remarkable and characteristic beauty was her mouth. The shape of her head was fine, her eyes were fine, there was something strong and striking, perhaps over-strong and slightly masculine, in her brow ; but the mouth was really and rarely beautiful in its curves, its colour, and its expression. Its extreme mobility, the fresh soft crimson of its lips, and the unblemished perfectness of its ivory white teeth, combined with the quick, bright flashings of her glance to give her a strangely

youthful look, which contrasted quaintly and piquantly with her snowy hair. Perhaps an early change in the colour of the hair was a family peculiarity, for Colonel Dacre's was already iron-grey, though his face, while decidedly not youthful, was full of fire and force, and his form of the vigour of mid-manhood.

They had been some moments silent, his eyes fixed thoughtfully on the fire, hers fixed on him, when she said, speaking out of what had been going on in her own mind,

“Yes, brother; I feel sure, quite sure, you will have no reason to be in any way discontented with Alice.”

“Discontented, Olivia! I hardly need to be told that!”

After glancing round the room to assure assurance that they two were still alone, he added in a lowered voice,

“ You know, sister, what my natural fear, which is my only fear, must be. That some one nearer her own age, and, in that respect at all events, better suited to her, should come between me and her heart.”

“ This has certainly not happened. Sure as I am that this has not happened, I feel no less sure that it will not. Alice has so grown up in reverence and love of you, and dutiful gratitude towards you, in enthusiastic admiration of you, you are so completely her hero, that only such change as could change her whole nature, and leave her no longer our Alice, could change her heart towards you. So I believe. Unless indeed there were, which there is not, and could not be, a younger you, a brother or a son, to be your rival.”

Colonel Dacre, slightly shaking his head, tried to look gravely unconvinced, but a

smile of tender content and of profound pleasure, beginning almost imperceptibly at the corners of his mouth, grew and grew, till it brightened over his whole face, bringing into stronger relief his likeness to his sister.

“ If this is so, to you I owe it.” Saying which, he took and kissed Olivia’s hand, drew it through his arm, and held it there.

“ Alice is, or so it seems to me,” Olivia went on—“ and I think I love her with the sort of love which would make me quick-sighted for any fault in her, just so perfect a little lady that, her love for you put aside, it would be difficult indeed to find anyone fit for her among the young men of to-day. She has grown up for you, Walter, and it is only you who are worthy of her, or whose love could satisfy her.”

“ It is pleasant truly to be at home again, and hear such loving flatteries from

such loving lips," commented Colonel Dacre, with happy, youthful, ringing laughter. "With all you have done, of every kind, in my absence, I know I shall be more than content; but most of all with the care you have had of Alice."

"All has been done to the best of my poor woman-wits' ability. But it is good, beyond anything I can say, to have the master home again. As to the care I have had of Alice, that is but care for my own. She was mine, you know, Walter, and only mine, long before she was anything to you, and I have not yet surrendered her."

At that moment the opening of the room-door made Colonel Dacre turn abruptly towards it.

CHAPTER II.

“ONLY GRACE.”

“All this
You only use to make me say I love him ;
I do confess I do. But that my fondness
Should fling itself upon his desperate follies——”

“IT is Grace,” said Miss Dacre, first to
see who it was entered the room.

“Yes, only Grace!” exclaimed that handsome young lady. She was about twenty, but with something in her bearing, of self-satisfied stateliness, that gave her the air of an older woman. “Only Grace,” she repeated, with a humorous and indulgent appreciation of the absurdity of the fact that by these people this could be felt as

an appropriate greeting for her—Grace Dunn. “I am very glad to see you home again, Uncle Walter,” she added. “Yes, you may kiss me.” And she graciously turned towards him a fresh soft cheek.

“You think Mr. Blatchford would allow it?” was asked maliciously.

“I shouldn’t dream of consulting him. I am, and have every intention of remaining, my own mistress.”

“Of course, of course. But that does not preclude the taking a master, I suppose?”

“I certainly shall never take a master.”

“Indeed! At any rate, you are looking very well, Grace; and I have no doubt Tom Blatchford will think so. It seems to me you have grown since I last saw you. You are as tall as Olivia, therefore tall enough for a woman. You mustn’t grow any more, young lady.”

“I can’t really have grown since you last saw me, uncle ; except, perhaps, a little stouter, and, let us hope, a little wiser.”

“Not too much wiser, I trust, Grace. You were a very wise young person for your years when I went away.”

“You needn’t flatter yourself that I don’t know you’re laughing at me ! I don’t think I was particularly deficient in wisdom, for my years, as you say, but there was of course some room for improvement, and I hope I have improved.”

“In good looks you certainly have ; as to anything else, I can’t possibly judge at present. Olivia has not given you a very bad character !”

“Indeed I should hope not !” Then, after a pause, with an effort to speak indifferently, Grace asked, “Did you travel from Ireland here alone, uncle ?”

“ No, Grace, I had a very pleasant companion. Why do you blush ?”

“ I didn’t blush. I’m not given to blushing.”

“ My eyes deceived me then—and flattered you !”

“ Don’t tease her, brother. There, I will question for her. Was Tom Blatchford your pleasant companion ?”

“ He was.”

“ Well ?” Grace asked, taking the questioning into her own hands. “ Is he more sane than when he went away ?”

“ As to that, Grace, I must leave you to form your own opinion. To me he appeared not only sane, but sensible. No doubt he will be here to-morrow, if not to-day.”

“ I don’t know that I will see him if he comes. I want first some guarantee that he is changed. I have found nothing to make me think so in his letters.”

“Take care, Grace, that, in your anxiety to change him, you don’t bring about such a change as you wouldn’t be anxious to effect—in the nature of his feelings towards you.”

“If there is any danger, or even any possibility, of such change as that, Uncle Walter, you won’t deny that the sooner it takes place the better for us both. You won’t deny that, will you?”

Colonel Dacre slightly shrugged his shoulders. He was walking restlessly to and fro, and wondering where Alice could be, what could so long delay her.

“That depends, Grace, upon what brings about the change. You must remember that Mr. Blatchford is my friend, that I can’t forbid him my house, and don’t wish my house made unpleasant either to him or to you.”

“And I am sure, brother, Grace is the

very last person who would wish to forbid him the house which is her home, or to make it unpleasant to him. She loves her old playfellow far too well to give him up —even for wilder follies or faults than his have ever been, or are ever likely to be."

"Surely, Aunt Olivia, that remains to be proved! I cannot understand what you have seen in my conduct to make you think me so foolishly, so disgracefully infatuated."

Grace's colour had heightened; she looked from her aunt to her uncle with her chin thrown up defiantly.

"I don't think it any proof of a foolish or disgraceful infatuation that you should be constant to an old friend, and able to forgive a good many faults in one whose love for you has borne a great deal from you."

"I deny that Tom has borne a great

deal from me. And if I have—and I don't deny that I have—a strong affection for him, I have probably a still stronger affection, or, at all events, respect for myself—anyway, too much respect to let me give myself to a spendthrift madman, who in twelve months would most likely disgrace and beggar me."

"If I believed the first part of your speech, Grace," said Colonel Dacre, "I should have little hope for you, and none for poor Tom if he became your husband. But I believe what you say of yourself, as little as you believe what you say of Tom."

"We take a very early opportunity of quarrelling, I must say, Uncle Walter."

"Are we quarrelling, Grace?"

"Grace would be quick to resent the use by anyone else of such harshly-exaggerating language about Tom as she used, I well know, Walter. She uses it for

the pleasure of hearing us contradict it."

"I know it, Olivia; but, as this subject has been brought upon the carpet, I am glad of the opportunity of telling Grace, before she and Tom meet afresh, that, in my opinion, she had better break her engagement once for all, and give up her lover, rather than enter upon a new struggle for mastery, in which the part she plays is a very unbecoming one, and in which she is quite sure to be worsted."

"I don't see any reason for being quite sure of that, uncle. Why should that be taken for granted?"

"According to my notions, the worst worsting of all would be what you might call victory. Your conquest would prove that you had no adversary worth conquering."

"According to your notions, as you say,

Uncle Walter; but my notions are very different. Do you know that yours are a little old-fashioned—just a little behind the age?"

"So I suppose, from things I have heard of the age, and of what is new-fashioned; but I believe that it would be for your happiness, always assuming what I do assume, that you love him, to condescend to be old-fashioned—to trust to Tom's generosity to make concessions, instead of trying to extract promises from him as conditions. He is not a child, to be managed by bribes and threats. If you would content yourself with the natural influence a loving woman has over the man who loves her, I think your chance of happiness would be a fair one, and your influence at least as great as would be for the mutual good."

"I cannot think of marrying a man

whose conduct I cannot approve," Grace answered, obstinately.

"We should none of us wish you to do that, dear," said Olivia. "What I complain of, or, rather, what I think Tom has some just right to complain of, is, that in all things you set up your standard as the right standard, your judgment as the higher judgment, and expect nothing but submission from poor Tom. You think so much—too much—of your own dignity, and not at all of his. I'm sure, Grace, that, were I a man, and treated by the woman I loved as I have known you treat Mr. Blatchford, your conduct would provoke me to wilder and wilder follies, and I would certainly give you up rather than let you tame me."

The flash of Miss Dacre's eyes confirmed her words.

"Oh! Aunt Olivia," Grace exclaimed,

patronizingly, “what a strange creature you are!—the truest woman, and yet with all your sympathies on the side of men! I can’t help feeling that I am more right than you are—on this subject, at all events,” was added, with conscious affability. “No modest, well-conducted girl, with a proper sense of her own value, could—”

“Excuse the interruption, Grace, but no girl really in love (not with herself) should have any sense of her own value, except to feel she has none.”

“You see, uncle, our ideas are so totally different that it isn’t much use for us to discuss these points.”

Grace spoke very sweetly, with pity and a very mild contempt for the benighted individual with whom she was forced to disagree.

“Nevertheless, Grace, I shall wish and

require to discuss these points with you again, on some fitting occasion. But now, does no one know where Alice is?"

The impatience of his tone accused of indifference those to whom he spoke.

"She was in her room when I came down," said Grace. "I have been expecting every minute to see her come in."

"In her room!" echoed Olivia, full of wonder. "Does she know Walter is come?"

"I'm not sure."

"What do you mean, Grace? You knew, and are not sure whether Alice knew!"

"For this reason, auntie," and Grace spoke more softly than she had yet spoken. "I put my head inside her door as I passed, and was going to speak, but Alice was kneeling by her bed, her face in her hands, so I came away quietly."

Colonel Dacre looked at his sister uneasily.

"I will go and fetch her," Olivia answered to his look, and went away. A minute after Grace, too, left the room.

CHAPTER III.

ALICE.

"Know you not the season sweet,
Windless, rainless, calm, and still,
Which, untouched of Summer's heat,
Hath forgotten Winter's chill?"

OLIVIA brought Alice no further than the door. This she opened for her, and shut behind her. Just within it Alice paused, a little dazed by the sudden gladness, warmth, and leaping firelight into which she had been brought from the sad-seeming dusk of her room.

The oaken panels of the door made a telling background for Alice's loveliness ; the peculiar charm of which was, perhaps, in the ex-

pression of the eyes, through which a sweet and wise maidenhood looked out of a face almost infantine in its flower-like delicacy of bloom. The texture and the tints of her complexion were of that utterly untouched-by-world's-use freshness and softness seldom seen save in a very young child, while those eyes were worlds of maid'enly thought and feeling.

“At last, Alice, at last! The very last to welcome me!”

“Only think, Lonel, of my having fallen asleep!”

The little laugh with which this was said told of over-tension; the sensitive mouth and the pretty chin quivered, the sweet eyes filled. She moved towards him, after that momentary pause, in a little flush and flutter of emotion. How his eyes gleamed, and how his heart beat, as he took the small cold hands in his, and drew

her towards the fire. Then, his arm thrown round her, he folded her to him, as gently as if she had been indeed a flower. His face was leaned down upon the golden head, and for some moments no word was spoken. He felt the quiver of a soft sob or two, and a few tears were shed against his breast.

“I did not mean a reproach, Alice,” he whispered upon her hair.

“But I can’t forgive myself for having fallen asleep. How could I do it?”

“You were wearied out with wandering, and watching for me.”

“Yes, and I was very sad, thinking again to-day you were not coming, and fearing that some accident had happened. And I had been praying for your safety. And then, somehow, I fell asleep. And now you are come—you are here safe and well!”

Ending, she lifted up her head and smiled into his face. Her eyes, all the clearer for just-dropped tears, were full of love and of joy. He felt wonderfully satisfied; blessed as he had never expected to be blessed. Alice had spoken of "praying" with the simplicity of a child whose faith has never shrunk with shyness from the touch of scoff or doubt.

"Yes, thank God, here safe and well!"

As he echoed her last words, he looked down upon her with immeasurable tenderness. Then, pressing her a little closer in his arm, he said,

"Why, what a little thing you are, Alice! After Grace and Olivia, there seems nothing of you! You haven't grown a bit since I last held you here, not a bit!"

"Does that disappoint you? Did you wish me to grow?" was asked, a little anxiously.

“ I don’t think I wanted any change.”

“ I’m glad you didn’t want me to grow,
because I don’t suppose I shall any more.”

“ I’m sure I didn’t want any change.”

“ Am I to call you the old name ?”

“ By all means.”

“ Won’t it sound foolish, now I’m so old ?
You remember how it began ? When I was
a child, and tried to imitate people who
called you ‘ Colonel,’ and couldn’t get any
nearer than ‘ Lonel !’ ”

“ I remember, Alice, and the name is
precious to me. All the more so that it
has only been used by you, that it is your
special name for me. Your Lonel you used
to call me, Alice.”

Alice smiled.

“ I should like to hear you call me so
now, Alice.”

“ Lonel, my Lonel !” she said, directly ;

but she whispered the words so softly that he hardly caught them.

And then Olivia came in. They kept their relative positions. Perhaps Colonel Dacre looked a little shy. During these first few minutes of meeting he had been playing the lover more than his wont. But Alice smiled up at Olivia with no shyness in her happy face, which said, as plainly as any words could have said,

“Everything seems right and well now Lonel is here !”

“That child is not ready for dinner, and it will be on the table in a quarter of an hour,” Olivia reminded them. “And you, too, brother, want to change your dress. Everything is ready for you in your dressing-room.”

“I don’t doubt that, Olivia, remembering your old fashion of spoiling me. Well, Alice, I must let you go as soon as I have

got you, it seems. Why you are not ready for dinner, though, I certainly fail to see, while owning that I am not. But Olivia must be obeyed."

He released Alice, who, however, before she went away, held her lips up for his kiss, as a child might have done. He stooped and gave it, and then turned quickly aside, not wishing to meet his sister's bright watching eyes just at that moment.

"Well?" questioned Olivia. And then her brother took and clasped in his her hand.

"It seems all too entirely well," he answered her, in a somewhat hoarse voice, not quite under his own control. "Too altogether happy a coming home. Where is the flaw, Olivia? I being still mortal, there must needs be some flaw."

"It is time you had some happiness, Walter."

“‘ Some happiness !’ but this is all happiness. And, even in the past, Olivia, with such a sister, I can hardly have had less than my share.”

“ You remember how your deer-hound would stand still any time to have his head patted ? I think he must have felt as I do when you praise me. Possibly your praise is all the more precious from my knowing that the greatest pain you have ever suffered in your life was caused you by my hand.”

“ But how unconsciously ! and how a thousand-fold atoned for !” And he kissed the hand he held.

Next moment he said,

“ Surely, Olivia, Alice is very remarkably fragile ? Why, when I held her just now leaning against me there seemed no weight nor substance in her.”

“ You must remember you had just seen,

and felt, two very substantial people—Grace and myself. Alice is certainly slight and delicate in frame, but she is perfectly healthy—not robust, and of a highly sensitive nervous organisation, but perfectly healthy. I have taken several opinions upon her, and they all agree in this."

"She is lovelier than ever. But the loveliness seemed to me quite too ethereal."

"She will look stronger when you have been home a little while. Don't you remember how, when she was still quite a child, she got ill—almost had nervous fever—merely from expecting you? Couldn't eat or sleep. It is something the same now. Only that now her feelings are, while of course much graver and deeper than ever before, under better control. When she has had the rest of being near you a few days, of finding that

you are not disappointed in her, but love her as much as ever, she will be quite blooming again."

"She is a very flower for bloom now; only it is the bloom of so fragile a flower that one would dread for it both sun and wind, lest it should fade! However," and he smiled an apologetic smile, "I will try not to fatigue you with rhapsodies. At this first meeting I have allowed myself a little license. But I don't mean to forget that an elderly man is apt to be ridiculous under certain circumstance, and I shall do what I can to avoid being so."

"What strikes me as ridiculous, Walter, is that you should speak of yourself as 'an elderly man.' There is no danger of your being ridiculous, in any other way, under any circumstance."

"You forget, Olivia, I might well have had a daughter older now than Alice is. It

is strange to think of this; and it almost makes me feel as if I had done wrong in letting this child promise herself to me."

"Well, brother, you are generous. She knows you meant what you told her—that she may take back her promise, and be free, whenever she cares for freedom. Years have not nearly so much as people think to do with age," she went on; "it would be by no means impossible that I should be Alice's grandmother; yet, in spite of my white hair of long standing, I can't feel old."

"You! you will never be old, Olivia. You are one of the immortals." And he lovingly passed his hand over the white hair.

CHAPTER IV.

OUT OF DARKNESS—LIGHT.

“ And from that buried grief there sprang a flower,
A thing of beauty and of mystic power :
It breathed sweet breath along deserted ways,
And shone in sunshine of departed days.”

O LIVIA believed that she loved Alice with the love of a mother for a peculiarly dear daughter ; but, probably, it was a different love from that of any mother for any daughter ; there being nothing of natural instinct in it, and so much of passionate romance.

“ Little Alice” was the only child of Kenelm Fairfax, and he was the only man Olivia Dacre had ever loved, with the love such a woman gives to her lover—to the

man she has chosen for her husband.

In her youth, Olivia's temper had been hot and hasty, her pride and her will indomitable, what she called her "religion" an enthusiastic bigotry, quite lacking charity. And, in this passionate youth of hers, the interference of "friends," his friends, between her and the man she was to have married, brought about coolness and misunderstanding; and from these grew that

"wrath with one we love
Doth work like madness in the brain,"

and separated them.

Circumstances did nothing to bring them together again; neither of them had chosen to try and control circumstances. Each believed in the inflexible obstinacy of the other, and believed that to sue for reconciliation would be only to incur fresh wounds, both to love and to pride. His friends rejoiced in the separation; she had

none who could help her—her brother being then a mere boy.

After a good many years Mr. Fairfax married Alice's mother, a lovely girl, devotedly attached to him. He married her out of compassion, because he saw no other way of helping her; his friends disliked this marriage more than they would have done that with Olivia, which, perhaps, was to him some source of satisfaction. The girl was of good family, but had been left a penniless orphan, and was occupying, when his attention was first drawn towards her, a half-menial position, for which her extreme delicacy and refinement, both of mind and of physique, made her peculiarly unfit. He married her. She enjoyed some months—they did not mount to years—of what seemed to her perfect happiness, and then she died in giving birth to Alice.

Alice was only a few months old when she lost her father. His death was the result of an accident, occurring while he was superintending some engineering works in a Cornish mine, of which he was the owner.

When Mr. Fairfax had, and knew that he had, only, at most, a few days to live, he sent for Olivia Dacre. He had been carried to a small inn close to the scene of the accident, and here Olivia came to him, and here she stayed with him till the end. He chose Olivia to be sole and absolute guardian of his child. He died with his hand in her hand, his head upon her breast. What passed between the dying man and Olivia no one, of course, ever fully knew. He was buried in the graveyard of a small old church overlooking the sea. Immediately after the funeral, Olivia fetched the baby Alice home to her at Heatherstone. From

that time the grief of Olivia's past seemed to have turned to sweetness and light. From that time Alice was the interest, the happiness, the poetry of Olivia's daily life.

When Alice was five years old her whole fortune, which should have been great, was swept away by the swindling mismanagement of her father's confidential agent. Olivia was glad. Glad, in spite of an awed consciousness that Kenelm would have been grieved. She clasped the child to her with a feeling that what had happened made Alice more entirely her own. Some of the relations of Alice's father, people who had shown willingness to make much of the little heiress, came forward at that time with offers of assistance in maintaining Alice—offers made for decency's sake, and which were so refused as to ensure no repetition of them, a thing

not much to be dreaded ; and little Alice, no longer an heiress, was allowed to remain the exclusive and unenvied property of Olivia Dacre..

During Alice's childhood and earlier girlhood, Walter Dacre was only twice, and at considerable intervals, at home. But the way he was loved and revered by the being whom Alice most loved and revered, made him the natural object of the child's and the girl's hero-worship. Of his bravery, his generosity, his chivalry, his tenderness, his humility, his unselfishness—in short, of all the virtues most distinctive of the true knight, accomplished gentleman, and Christian soldier, as his—Alice was always hearing. And not merely hearing his possession of all these virtues vaguely and abstractedly asserted, but hearing anecdotes of him, and details, such as both to teller and listener proved

and realized such assertions. Olivia delighted to repeat to Alice all she knew of her own knowledge, and all she had, from time to time, heard from different of his friends, in illustration of her brother's spotless knight-errantry, his unflinching integrity, his unblenching courage and his unsullied honour.

There was, however, one chapter of her brother's history which set some of these things in stronger light than did any other, of which, nevertheless, Olivia never spoke to Alice. Its events had happened before Alice was born, in Olivia's impetuous, unchastened days; they were of too harrowing a kind of tragedy, or so Olivia thought, to be retailed to so young, so susceptible and sensitive a creature. Olivia always shared with Alice the delight of her brother's letters—either reading them to her, or giving them to her to read to herself. Their tone

and style, the slight vein of subdued and submissive sadness, and the loving thoughtfulness for others running through them, just added the touch of grace and tenderness to Alice's heroic ideal.

Of Walter's boyhood, to which she had played the mother's part, Olivia was never tired of talking; dwelling on its gallant grace, its frank-eyed fearlessness, its noble ambitions, its most winsome lovingness.

Up to a certain time Olivia had been quite without second motive for this constant speech, which was always praise, of her brother. He was her nearest and her dearest, and what could be more natural than that she should talk long and lovingly about him to Alice, who loved to listen, she did not care how long?

Of all other young men—(Colonel Dacre being nearly fifteen years younger than herself, and she herself, in spite of what

she had suffered, feeling so young, she was apt to think and to speak of him as still in the early prime of manhood)—Olivia was prone to judge harshly; she tried them by the standard of the real or the imagined brother, and either found or fancied them wanting! So when Olivia saw her darling Alice change from child to maiden, and began to wonder what man's breast could be worthy to wear so lovely a flower, she began also, involuntarily at first, to dedicate Alice to her brother. Alice was to make his future smile, and Alice was to soothe him from all memories of the past. For her part in the sorrow of that past she would, she felt, make, indeed, atonement if she gave him her Alice. Sometimes Olivia wondered whether, possibly, she had not overdone her eulogies; so much exalted her brother into a hero that fear and wonder could hardly leave room for love in so

singularly timid while so staunchly loyal a heart as that of little Alice. But little Alice had some highly-prized memories, some childish experiences of her own, of the marvellous, almost feminine gentleness and loving patience of this “true Walter,” which helped her to love him in spite of fear, though not, perhaps, with such love as casts out fear.

The child Alice had learnt by heart, for the sake of its name, long before she could enter into the subtle pathetic beauty of its meaning, that exquisite ballad of Uhland’s, “Vom treuen Walther.” When the time came in which that meaning—of everlasting love and everlasting grief, of iron inflexibility towards sin, joined with most compassionate tenderness for the sinner—revealed itself to her, she felt that if ever she should prove “die falsche Maid,” just so would her true Walter feel to

the sinner and the sin ; just so would he look down upon her, supplianting at his feet, his arms rigidly folded, but his eyes expressive of infinite pity, answering,

“ Steh auf, steh auf, du armes Kind !
Ich kann dich nicht erheben ,
Die Arme mir verschlossen sind,
Die Brust ist ohne Leben.
Sey traurig stets, wie ich es bin !
Die Lieb' ist hin, die Lieb' ist hin,
Und kehret niemals wieder.”

CHAPTER V.

HOW IT CAME ABOUT.

“ Sie spricht so ganz mit Kindersinne,
So fromm ist ihrer Augen Spiel;
Doch grosser Dinge werd’ ichinne,
Ich schau in Tiefen ohne Ziel.”

BETWEEN the times of Alice’s fifteenth and of her nineteenth birthday, Colonel Dacre, then on home service, had been more at Heatherstone. On the last of these visits Olivia’s bright eyes had detected a secret entirely in accordance with her heart’s desire, a secret which Colonel Dacre himself supposed to be shrouded in profound mystery; this secret being that her

brother's love for Alice had changed—was no longer the love given to a child.

Immediately on detecting this, it came to be with Olivia a matter of passionately enthusiastic longing that Alice, pure and unspotted from the world, by even a thought, in the untouched dew, perfect freshness, unbreathed on bloom of her loveliness, both of soul and of body, should become Walter's wife. That thought, hope, idea, took full possession of Olivia. Looking on Alice, she many and many a time murmured to herself, smiling at the sweet music she found in her own murmur, "Walter's wife." She dwelt on this thought as a loving mother might have dwelt, and yet differently, without the jealousy with which a mother can hardly help thinking of a son's marriage. Very likely indeed there was more of selfishness than Olivia knew, though she taxed herself with some,

in this longing of hers ; because this giving away of Alice to Walter, of Walter to Alice, was so much more like keeping them both than any other giving away of either could possibly have been.

Somehow Olivia's desire brought about at all events the beginning of its own fulfilment. Just a year before this last, best, and, as they all believed, final home-coming of Colonel Dacre's, which has just been recorded, Alice, to her own amazement, to her own great awe, found herself the betrothed wife of her hero ; almost unable to be conscious of joy through the vastness of her bewilderment. Perhaps it was Olivia who had the greatest and most untroubled joy in this betrothal—a betrothal which Colonel Dacre, for Alice's sake, wished at present should remain unknown. It was Olivia who could have cried, “ Now let Thou Thy servant depart

in peace ;" but to whom, nevertheless, to remain in this bright world, sharing, while God so permitted, the happiness of the happy, seemed a yet more desirable thing.

Alice was marvellously unsophisticated. She had read no novels, heard few tales of love ; she had listened to no light girlish talk of love and lovers. She could not doubt that she loved her "Lonel," nor that he loved her. She had always loved him, she had always felt herself beloved by him. That there might be need for love to change for love, that his had done so while perhaps hers had not, she had no means of knowing, no reason for suspecting. As far as she knew, all was right, or would grow right. Meanwhile, to find herself lifted from her self-assumed place at her hero's feet, to be raised to his side, told she was to share his life, to feel herself loved worshipfully, with reverence, held as

something most precious and exquisite, instead of being allowed to worship; all this overwhelmed little Alice.

He had been wise, and he had been considerate. Though all through that last visit of his he had tried to make her feel the nature of the change in his love for her, had placed her on her woman's pedestal, whenever she would have taken her childish place at his feet, yet it was not till just as he was about to leave her that he put his changed love into words, let her feel something of a lover's passion in his "good-bye" clasp and kiss; and then he would not have her answer, would give her time to think, to accustom herself in his absence to the new aspect of things between them, to try to understand her own heart. Olivia, he told her, could write her answer to him, unless she liked better to write it herself.

Of course she had written the answer herself—in a little letter of what he felt to be adorable humility, simplicity, and lovingness. And of course her answer had been all in the sense that she was and would be his.

Had Olivia unconsciously betrayed her darling and deceived her brother? Nothing had yet happened to prove anything either way. Sometimes, during that last year of absence, he had feared that this had been so, and had accused himself of ungenerous selfishness in letting so fair, so young, so innocent a creature bind herself to him, while she was yet ignorant of the whole world of other men. He assured himself, as in his letters he had assured her, that he would not hold her bound.

Sometimes, too, he felt as if he could also assure himself that Alice, as his wife, would have a happier, nobler, and more

congenial existence than his knowledge of the world showed to him as likely to be hers in other hands. But on that view of the question he quickly checked himself from dwelling. He and Olivia had no right to play Providence for Alice—she must be left free to know, to will, to choose.

It had not been Alice's loveliness, nor his own lover-like consciousness of it, that had moved him to speak when he had spoken. It had rather been the echoing in his heart of some only-too-gladly-believed words of Olivia's, about what Alice suffered at the thought of this parting (words confirmed, as it had seemed to him, by what he read in Alice's own face when the hour of parting came), that had quickened to action his irrepressible longing to take the fair girl into his cherishing arms, and speak to her of the possibility that

this, if she so willed it, should be their last such parting. Holding her hands in his, looking into her woe-begone little face, he had said,

“ Such partings as these are weary work, Alice. Olivia tells me you have been grieving much at the prospect of my going away.”

She only looked up into his face. The tears, of which her eyes had been full, fell upon her pale cheeks, and her mouth quivered convulsively. To watch the workings of that sweet mouth almost unmanned him. He went on—

“ Olivia tells me the thought of this parting has tried you more than the thought of any other parting has ever tried you. Is this because you love me more than you have done before ?”.

She tried to answer; not succeeding, she suddenly hid her face in his breast, and

sobbed there, as she would have done in Olivia's, had it been Olivia who stood before her. He clasped her to him then, and said,

“Alice, my darling”—he had never called her that before, and her heart made a sort of pause at the sound of the words—“would it help you—would it make things easier, and you happier, if you could think of this as our last such parting, and as only a short parting—not for years, but only for months?”

“You can't need to ask that, Lonel,” she answered, so softly that he had to bend down his head to hear what she was saying.

“It might be so, Alice,” he pursued, trying to speak calmly—speaking heedfully, with a sense of something precious hanging in a balance to which even an incautious breath might give a wrong turn,

“if I could hope that, when I come home again, I should find that you have learned to love me.”

He paused there. Alice lifted up her head and looked into his face with a child-like wonder and grieved surprise. The utter absence of all consciousness of what he could mean smote him grievously. He did not speak; he felt as if it would be in some sort disloyal to explain himself further, and trouble such quiet-heartedness. Such explanation must, at all events, be postponed—postponed till Alice was older; when he, too, alas! would be also older, and he had no years to lose. So thinking, some passionate sort of “divine despair” forced a sigh from him.

Meanwhile what was Alice saying? She was perplexedly echoing his words.

“Learned to love you, Lonel! Lonel, what can you mean? Have I not always

loved you?—do I not love you dearly?"

Then, either some new sense coming into the sound of what she said, or that sigh of his and what looked out of his eyes into hers as he breathed it, startled Alice. A wave of delicate, celestial rosy-red swept over her face, her eyes drooped before his. He gathered her closely to him; he told her in a few strong, simple words what he had meant.

No doubt the words were ordinary words enough, but they were spoken in a tone which, though very quiet, yet had something in it that shook Alice's heart; whether her agitation were most of fear or of delight she could not tell.

He would not have her answer. He transferred her from his own arms to Olivia's, who had been hovering near, and was gone long, long before Alice had re-

covered from the shock. His last words had been,

“I have learnt to believe, Alice, that such happiness as I never looked to experience might come to me from your dear hands, if you could be happy in loving me as your husband.”

CHAPTER VI.

HOW THE WINTER PASSED.

“ The secret that doth make a flower a flower
So frames it, that to bloom is to be sweet,
And to receive to give.”

AS to how Alice should spend the year that was to intervene between that parting and the coming home “ for good ” of Colonel Dacre, there had arisen a difference of opinion between the brother and sister.

Colonel Dacre had suggested that she should pass at least part of “ the season ” in town, to see a little of society, and to be introduced (not as his betrothed, but

as his sister's adopted child) to the very large Dacre circle of friends and connections. Of this, Olivia would not hear. No doubt she had many reasons against it, but the one she urged—and urged so strongly that against her urging there could be no appeal—was the delicacy of Alice's organization.

"It would be just killing her," wrote Olivia. "She is perfectly healthy, but she is not strong. Pure country air, early hours and simple ways, are necessary for her. If you give her, instead, heated, impure atmosphere, excitement, and late hours, even for a few months or weeks, you will probably sow the seeds of disease. Remember, brother, that she is mine as yet—my daughter till she becomes your wife."

Of course this had settled the matter, and Alice had remained at Heatherstone.

And now that year had passed, and Colonel Dacre was home "for good." Olivia wished that the engagement should now be made known in the neighbourhood, and that a date for the marriage should be fixed. But in this, Colonel Dacre would not yield. He said,

" Though I may feel I am growing old, and have no years to lose, we must remember what a young creature Alice is ; she must have time, time to accustom herself to seeing me in this new light, and time to be sure she knows that she does not mistake her own heart.

If Colonel Dacre erred in his conduct towards his little betrothed during the first weeks he was at home, it was on the side of being too quiet and undemonstrative—too much afraid to startle her by any lover-like word or look. He was so much as he had always been, that, at times,

Alice felt as if she might have dreamt all that made the difference. It is true that, when he spoke to her, something came into his voice, to harmonize with a something in his eyes which was not in eyes or voice for anyone else; but Alice had always been treated by him with extreme tenderness. He wondered sometimes if Alice had any notion of the inexplicable sort of happiness her mere presence gave him; but, for a number of dimly recognised reasons, all owing their existence, probably, to the generous nature of the man, he did not at present speak to her of this.

And Alice, during those first weeks, felt constrained, she could not guess why, to an unnatural sort of hush and stillness. She would walk beside Colonel Dacre, her hand upon his arm, up and down the wood-paths, over their rich, red, russet carpet of fallen beech-leaves, hardly

speaking, sometimes hardly hearing what he said, because so much was always saying itself in her own heart, and so indistinctly that she had a sense of being on the strain to listen and to understand.

Once Alice carried something of her bewilderment to Olivia, asking softly,

“Did Lonel really mean it? Does he still wish it, do you think, Olivia?”

“Did he mean what? Does he still wish what, my darling?”

“Mean what he said before he went away, wish me to be his wife?”

Alice, who was sitting in the twilight, on a footstool at Olivia’s feet, laid a blushing face on Olivia’s knee.

“If you have any doubt, you had better ask Walter himself, Alice.”

“I could not do that.”

“But, child, you can’t really have any doubt. Is it possible that Walter would

speak lightly of such things, or change easily about them?"

Alice gave a little sigh, which startled Olivia.

"Why do you sigh, Alice? Why do you ask such questions?"

"Indeed, I hardly know."

"Are you not happy, Alice?"

"Happy, Olivia! I have never known what it was not to be happy, I think."

"Try and tell me then, dear child, what made you question as you did."

"A sort of dreamy feeling that comes over me, as if it must be all a mistake—as if he must for a moment have forgotten that I was only Alice—as if he must have felt very disappointed, and as if he had made a mistake afterwards."

"But it is just 'only Alice' that Walter loves, as he never loved anyone,—think of

that, Alice—not anyone, before, and never will love anyone again.”

“I do think of that, and—it frightens me.”

“But, Alice, it is nothing new to you to be loved.”

“Indeed, no. But, Olivia, this is so different. You love me just as I am. Now, if what Lonel spoke of is to come true—if I am to be Lonel’s wife” (she paused), “then I feel as if I had to learn to be something so different from what I am, so much more and better than just only me.” She looked wistfully into Olivia’s face, and said, in so softly awe-struck a voice as to be hardly audible, “Think of me, just only me, being called ‘Mrs. Colonel Dacre !’”

“Quite ridiculous, certainly.” And Olivia fondly kissed the wistful white brow.

“Don’t laugh at me, please, just now, because it is really all so very serious ! Don’t you remember how we used to talk

of Lonel's marrying, and how we used to agree that it would be so difficult, almost impossible, to find any lady worthy to be his wife? How can I be fit?"

"Let us suppose, Alice, that you are not at all fit, but that he is so foolish as to think you fit, and to love you so dearly, so deeply, that he can't love anyone else, ever, in that way. Well, dear, haven't we always spoiled him? Never refused him anything? I have, at all events; and now he wants you, and I want to give you to him. But, to be serious, Alice, for a good while now it has been my heart's desire that you should be Walter's wife. You are, as you urge, an insignificant little thing—very little of you, physically, at all events; but you either are, or we think you, so pure, so true, so sweet, so lovely, that—"

Here Olivia's voice failed her. She kissed

Alice's head, and leant her own cheek upon it. But Alice was not silenced.

"Even if I were all that, still, oh! so far, Olivia, from being enough," she said. "We used to agree that his wife should be a grand woman, a noble woman, a queen among women. I used to think she should be a woman like you."

"White-haired, and almost old enough to be his mother?"

"Her hair need not have been white—though your hair is more beautiful than any other I have ever seen. And, of course, she might have been like what you were when you were younger."

"Well, sweet, it is labour in vain to speculate on what might have been. It is just you whom Walter loves. It is just you who can give sweetness, and dearness, and preciousness to his life. It is just you who are shrined in his heart. It is just

you who are lovely in his eyes. It is just you who must be his wife."

At that moment Colonel Dacre himself entered the fire-lighted room.

"Walter," Olivia said, "Alice thinks you could not have really meant that you wish to make her your wife—that it must have been a dream, a mistake—that if, for a little while, you meant it, you must have changed your mind."

Colonel Dacre paused, where the full firelight flashed on his face, and looked down on Alice.

"What do you mean, Olivia?" he asked; but he looked at Alice.

"It seems to Alice, Walter, altogether too ridiculous to be true that you should wish to make her Mrs. Colonel Dacre. Only some queen or princess is, according to Alice, fit for that honourable post. And Alice seems to think that you must have

found out, Walter, that she is not fit for it—that she is too—— What is it, Alice? Ignorant, foolish, diminutive, altogether beneath your notice."

At that moment they both became aware that Alice was softly sobbing. She could not tell them why. The trouble was a real one, but a vague one; something it was impossible to put into words. She presently laughed at herself, however, and said,

"I think it was childish bad-temper, because I felt as if I were being made fun of, when I was so very much in earnest."

Olivia left the soothing of Alice to her brother, and went away. After that Alice was not exercised by any more doubts as to whether Colonel Dacre "really meant it," or "still wished it."

During the year that had passed between Colonel Dacre's leave-taking confession and his return, Alice had dedicated herself to

Colonel Dacre, trying, in every way she could think of, to make herself less unfit for her future, to raise herself a little nearer the standard of what she thought Lonel's wife should be. She had set herself to do this with such intensity that the year had been a strain upon her, and directly she was again in Colonel Dacre's presence—their changed position towards each other yet a novelty, practically, though she may have believed she had accustomed herself to it theoretically—she seemed to have failed in everything. She felt more than ever childish and ignorant. She shrank, as from undue glory and exaltation, from her future. In fact, the child in Alice was tired of trying to play the woman. She needed rest, perhaps she needed amusement and equal companionship. The wealth of love poured upon her at once weighed her to the ground in humility, as a fragile flower

is weighed down with wealth of honey-dew, and gave her a sense of needing to lift herself beyond her own level to meet it worthily.

So, during these first weeks, Alice could hardly have been called happy. But, by degrees, in part owing to her own habitual freedom from self-consciousness, but in still greater part owing to Colonel Dacre's instinctive delicacy, wise forbearance, and patient undemonstrativeness, Alice found herself at rest. It came to feel as simply and happily natural that the place beside him should be her place, as, when he had once been some time at home while she was a tiny child, it had then been natural to claim as her place the stool at his feet. She could not help gradually learning how precious she was to him, how much happiness she could give him; and the joy born in her of this knowledge was very deep,

very tender, very humble. To be all, and only, and always his, slowly came to be her one view of life.

Happily for Alice, his tender approval of all she said and all she did, could not raise in her belief that she was perfect, but, while it stimulated her to try to be always her highest and best self of which he should approve, it also helped her to be so by setting her restfully at ease in his presence. Alice did not notice half the things Olivia noticed as signs of the depth and intensity of Colonel Dacre's love. Olivia's bright eyes lost nothing. She noticed the expression, as if listening to satisfying music, with which Alice's movements were watched; his restlessness when she was absent from the room; the deep content that shone on his face when she re-entered it. These things, and how many others! Truly, Olivia, loving her brother as she did, must

have trembled for him had she not been very sure of Alice. She was ready enough to own that probably there was not another girl of Alice's age in the world with whom such a love would have been safe, but she had no fear for it with Alice.

If Colonel Dacre could have welcomed any change in Alice, he would have liked a trifle more of playful lightness or of loving tyranny. Alice was almost too nun-like in the serious earnestness of her devotion, too much resembled "a maiden vowed and dedicate" to something more than mortal love.

"I wish, Olivia," he one day said, and there was a shade of impatience in his voice, of the ingratitude of which he was immediately ashamed, "you had not encouraged Alice to make quite so great a hero of me. I feel sometimes as if the manner in which she loves me must make

that love a strain and a fatigue to her."

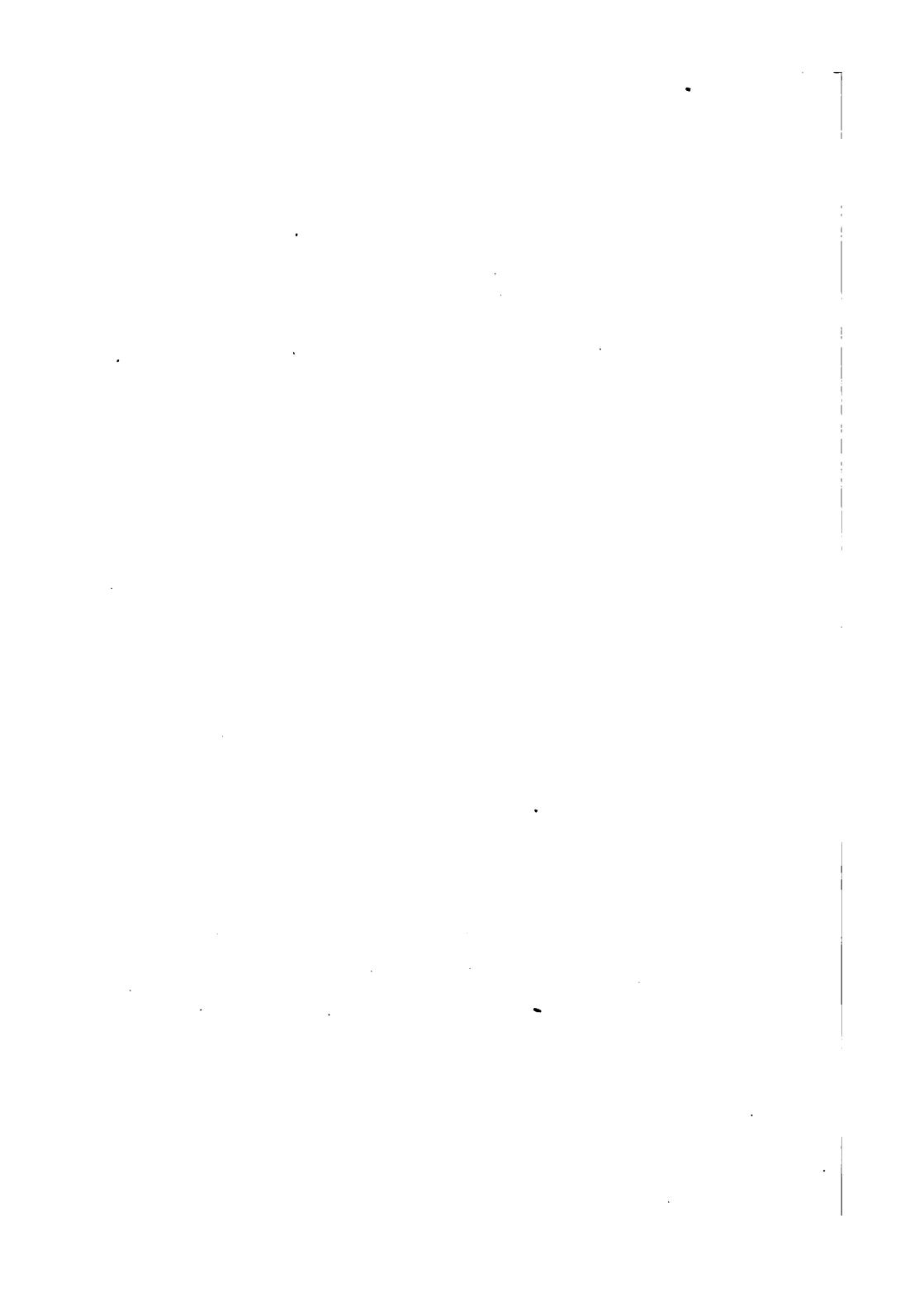
"When you first came home, and she was so afraid lest in any way she should disappoint you, I believe it was, I felt a little anxious about her. But not now."

"But now, even, she is too seriously worshipful; she is too humble. Surely you can find some way of teaching her that I am but a very ordinary mortal!"

"I should first have to learn that lesson before I could teach it," Olivia answered with a tender-toned laugh. Then she went on: "The other day I tried a step in the right direction by abusing your crabbed writing; yesterday I called you (to Alice) a dreadful fidget about your flannel waist-coats. On both occasions I provoked from her a loving little rhapsody about your wounded shoulder, and the way you got the wound. What can I do, Walter? How can I help you?"

“God bless my darling !” came fervently from Colonel Dacre.

That Winter passed very happily. At all events Colonel Dacre had never been so happy. Old friends gathered round him, new duties pressed thick upon him. And the very secret of all sweetness nestled at his heart. The comic element of the Heatherstone atmosphere was supplied by the very last person who would have wished to appear in a comic light—Grace, and another person, Tom Blatchford, her lover, who was always glad to raise a laugh, even if it were at his own expense. As ill-assorted a couple, one would have said, as could easily be found, each bringing into high relief the faults of the other, and yet radically attached to each other, whatever Grace might pretend to the contrary.

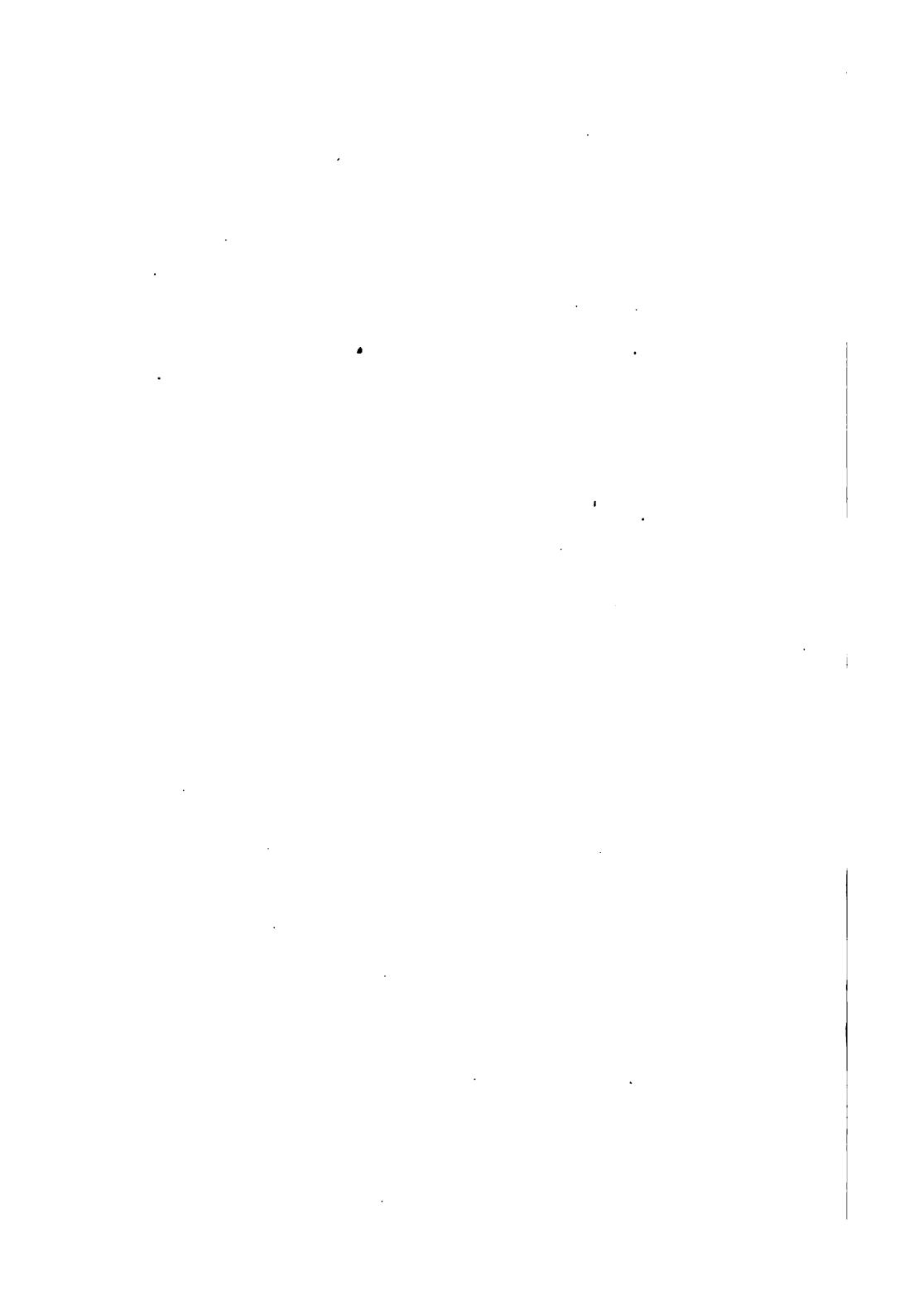


B O O K I I.

S P R I N G.

VOL. I.

G



CHAPTER I.

SPRING TWILIGHT.

“ In the Spring-twilight, in the coloured twilight,
Whereto the latter primroses are stars,
And early nightingale
Letteth her love adown the tender wind,
That through the eglantine
In mixed delight the fragrant music bloweth
On to me,
Where in the twilight, in the coloured twilight,
I sit beside the thorn upon the hill.”

SPRING often came late to Heather-stone. Though the old house stood in a sunny and sheltered spot, it was on high ground, and the air all about it was keen and bracing. You passed into another climate when you left the shelter of

its plantations and its shielded south exposure. This year, however, the latter half of April had been almost summer-like for warmth and beauty. No snow had lain even upon the moors since the end of March.

It was now May when Alice was sitting alone at twilight on a favourite seat, on the highest level of the steep terraced garden that, rising behind the house, was ridged in by the edge of the moor, a wide-sweeping billowy expanse, part of which had once been the county race-course. From where Alice sat she looked, through the rosy-blossomed boughs of an apple-tree, past the rich-red, half-opened leaf-sprays of an ancient walnut, away over the many-gabled up-and-down irregular roofs, the quaintly-picturesque variety of chimneys, and the gleaming high-up lattices of the old house, to a tract of loveliest and

most subtle after-sunset colour. She could watch the misty purpling evening run up the folds of the hills, whose crests still shone in reflected light so bright and clear and vivid as to seem like sunshine, though the sun had set.

Alice had just finished reading a new poem which had been brought her the day before by Colonel Dacre. It was a simple sad, sweetly-said love-story, in which were, here and there, passages of true passion, and it had an intensely pathetic close. Its last words had been just read in the soft enchanted light of that May evening; the book, open at its last page, still lay upon Alice's knee. Alice's cheeks were whitened by emotion, her eyes made larger and more lustrous, and their lashes were wet. Her face had a listening look, and her lightly-parted lips seemed ready for reply. By what she had been reading something had

been stirred in Alice's quiet heart that stirred there for the first time. What it was, whether pain or pleasure, sorrow or delight, which had been set vibrating, Alice, less than anyone, could have told.

Alice knew it was time she should go indoors—knew that Colonel Dacre, who had ridden over to Greythorpe, a house he had taken for some friends, and in the preparation of which for their comfort he and Olivia had much occupied themselves, would probably about this time be returning, and would look for her to meet him, to question him, to listen to him, to show her sympathy in his interest and his anxiety. But this evening dutiful little Alice did not feel dutiful. To go indoors did not seem possible. The air was just one balmy fragrance, which a hundred sweet odours—from the flowers and the leaves, from the earth itself, from everything be-

tween the earth and the sky, and even, so it seemed, from the sky itself—went to compose, and which the dew blended into bland harmony. And within Alice there was this new vibration, as of some hitherto untouched fibres of her being. And what this all meant—all this melody of sights and sounds and scents—what the thrush was singing, so gloriously as to rouse the rivalry of the nightingale—what the stream was saying in the valley, what the little wind that lifted the soft hair upon her forehead sighed out, she felt just as if on the very verge of discovering. She felt as if just another undisturbed moment and the clue to it all would have been hers.

And at that moment a well-beloved voice (in which, possibly, she should have felt the clue to it all) called her name.

“Alice, Alice, Alice!”

For the first time, and even now without

her own consciousness that this was so, the sound of that voice was not entirely welcome. Perhaps Alice felt as some child feels who in its dreams has strayed into elf-land, who is about to be taught all the mysteries of the kingdom, to be able for ever afterwards to understand all the secrets of the flowers, all the sayings of the birds, the sorrows the dew is wept for, and the rain falls for, and what it is everything laughs about when the sun shines, and the wind blows, and the streams babble and sparkle; and who, then, just at the critical moment, is awakened by some mortal touch of lips or hand, and all its palace of pretty pleasures destroyed.

Perhaps, for the first time, Alice had been bordering upon some recognition of the difference between her life and that of most girls; of how she was shielded and sheltered, and everything settled for her;

of how free from all struggles, temptations, excitements, hopes and fears, her existence had always been, and was always likely to be. Before she had begun to dream about her future, that future had shaped itself. She had fancied no fancies, formed to herself no images of lover or husband, and she was to be Mrs. Colonel Dacre !

Is it possible she felt saddened, as by some vague sense of loss ? Anyway, that evening for the first time the mellow pleasant voice which called her name was not entirely welcome. It was as if some new individuality in her, with which it was not in harmony, had been wakened. She slightly shivered as she gathered herself back into herself.

Before she had moved, or had answered Colonel Dacre's call, he had caught the gleam of her light dress, and was springing up the steps and steep paths to her side, in

a manner that proved him to be agile, sinewy, and strong as his son might have been, had he had a son.

“I didn’t think you would be back quite so soon,” Alice said, smiling up into his face.

The sense of not being quite at home in herself, and, therefore, of being somewhat absent from him, still lingered.

“I think you, Alice, must have been here too long,” he answered, smiling down on her with that expression in his eyes which made words of endearment needless. “You look pale, and as if you were cold.”

She denied being cold, but the hands she put into his, stretched out to help her to rise, were very cold. He stood still a few moments, gently chafing her hands, having drawn her to lean against him, and gazed out over the wide deep wonderful beauty

of the time and scene. Then he looked down on the fair creature beside him, looking fairer than even her wont to him in the soft enchanted light, and sighed out of the sadness that comes to such of us mortals as know a momentary over-fulness of satisfaction.

“I hope it is not a very Pagan thing to feel, Alice,” he said, “but I seem to long to know that I have a hundred years in which to live and to enjoy it all! It is with a keen pang I remember that I am no longer young.” A pause. Alice had pressed her cheek against him as her only answer. Then he went on: “The beauty and gladness of life have got into my head this evening, and I am full of fantastical wishes. I wish for one thing, Alice, I had the power to invent some way by which I could keep you always with me—by diminishing you, for instance, from your

majestic proportions to a size that would make it possible to carry you in my breast-pocket. A wish you won't share with me, for it's little liberty you'd get, you fairy, if I had that wish."

The smile was somewhat rueful.

"So you think I like liberty better than to be with you, Lonel?"

"I won't too curiously question the extent of my happiness," he answered; "I will tell you instead why I so abruptly disturbed your twilight reverie, and why I want you now to come to the house. My friends rode back with me. I want you to see them—still more, I want them to see you."

"Your friends!—what friends?—you have so many friends."

"My friends from Greythorpe, Alice. They have come two days earlier than we expected them. When I rode over there

this evening, I found them about to start on their way hither."

"Oh ! Lonel, I am glad, for I know by your face and your voice how this pleases you."

"Indeed it pleases me—pleases me most deeply. You know something of how strangely strong is my love for young Julian. I feel to-night as if all blessedness, the fulfilment of all my wishes, crowded upon me at once. I am too happy, Alice—too happy."

Again Alice's only answer was a pressure of her cheek against his arm. Then she questioned—

"Am I fit to be seen as I am, Lonel, or must I put my hair tidy first ? I don't want your friends to think me very untidy."

"You will do," answered Colonel Dacre, after he had looked at her, and had, with a

few light, loving touches, pushed the hair back from a forehead that was of as perfectly unlined a smooth whiteness as any child's.

This hair of Alice's was a trouble to her ; it made her, she thought, look more childish than she need otherwise have done. She did not appreciate its peculiar prettiness, and she suffered from the difficulty of keeping it "neat." It was, for texture, more like a baby's hair than a woman's, and it wouldn't grow long. It was so soft, so light, that the least puff of wind would disorder it. It couldn't be "dressed" in any proper conventional fashion, but had to be let lie pretty much according to its own will in pale golden clouds on the fair forehead. Alice envied Grace her long, rich, dark, smooth tresses, which gave her no trouble, and looked always in perfect order. Nevertheless, Alice could not help

knowing that Colonel Dacre's "You will do," when he had touched the refractory flakes, meant all manner of praiseful lovingness of admiration. They began their descent towards the house.

"Mrs. Burmander is not here, I suppose?" said Alice.

"Alas! no; she is far worse than I expected, even. Her disease has made terribly rapid progress. It is only the dear old General and young Julian who rode back with me. I must take you to Mrs. Burmander to-morrow, if you will let me."

"Of course I will let you—there, or anywhere," was answered, with soft fervour.

Alice looked up into Colonel Dacre's face presently, as they were descending towards the house. The light of a great quiet joy overspread it, softened and beautified it. Alice, who had never seen it

look exactly like that before, she thought, said,

“I should think anyone could tell that you love that boy who hears you say ‘young Julian,’ and who notices how you look when you are thinking of him. I suppose it is, in great part, at all events, because his father, Captain Farquhar, was your best friend ?”

“Young Julian is not a boy now, Alice, as you will see, except to an old fellow of my years, who was his father’s (his adopted father’s) friend. Why I love him you will all understand as soon as you know him—at least, I think so ; and you will all, I think, love him, not only for my sake, but also for his own—as I certainly love him, not only for his father’s sake, but for his own.”

And here, while he was saying this, Colonel Dacre became suddenly aware of a

curious sensation—an imperious check or pull at his heart-strings. Question?—warning?—prophecy? Whatever it was, he pushed it aside, to be attended to, if at all, at some other time. He went on speaking, and spoke a little faster than his habit, and he rather hurried the pace at which they were walking; he also drew Alice's hand closer against him.

"You mustn't let General Burmander frighten you, Alice. He is rather a rough diamond, he speaks loud, and makes noisy jokes; but he is as kind-hearted a creature as it is possible to imagine."

"I shan't be frightened, Lonel, by General Burmander, or by anybody, if I am near you."

But Alice's hand tightened her hold of his arm, as they got close to the house, for, in truth, Alice felt nervous. When they were quite close, she whispered,

“They don’t know, do they, Lonel?”

“Know what?” Something in her softly blushing face answered him. “No, darling, they don’t know, not yet, how happy I am! But, Alice, they will soon find out.” And it was Colonel Dacre’s turn to feel slightly nervous, in anticipation of the General’s banter.

“I’m glad they don’t know,” said Alice.

“Why are you glad?”

“Because it makes it of so much less consequence what they think of me, and so I shan’t feel so shy.”

CHAPTER II.

COLONEL DACRE'S FRIENDS.

“ Wonder not that I call a man so young my friend :
His worth is great : valiant he is, and temperate ;
And one that never thinks his life his own,
If his friend need it.”

COLONEL DACRE, leaving Alice with Olivia and Grace in the drawing-room, went in search of his friends, who had not yet entered the house, but had gone round to one of the paddocks to look at a horse of which Colonel Dacre had been speaking. When he returned with them, before he had had time to go through any form of introduction, General Bur-

mander, a red-faced, white-haired, white-moustached, cheery blue-eyed and hearty loud-voiced old gentleman, exclaimed,

“ Why, hang it, Dacre, what a sly dog you are ! We thought, Julian here and I —at least, I thought, and, if he knew better, he never told me—that we were coming into barrack bachelor-quarters, and here we are, taken by storm, youth and beauty and fashion charging us at a disadvantage ! 'Pon my life, it isn't fair ! And how a man blessed with such a wife and such daughters could refrain from boasting a little of his wealth, I can't understand. I always knew you were one of the quiet and deep ones, but—eh, Julian, what's the matter ? Blundering as usual, am I ? Why didn't you put me right in time, then ? Well, Dacre, explain yourself. No need to blush, man. Introduce me—introduce me ! ”

“That is just what I am waiting to do, General. As to blushing, that’s not much in my line.” But, nevertheless, the bronze of Colonel Dacre’s face was a little more ruddy than usual. “Let me,” he then proceeded, “have the pleasure of presenting my old friend, General Burmander, to my sister, the ‘Olivia’ of whom, I am sure, you have often heard me speak ; to my niece Grace, Miss Dunn ; and to my sister’s adopted daughter, Miss Alice Fairfax, the ‘little Alice’ of whom, I am also sure, you have heard.”

Then, his hand grasping Julian’s shoulder, Colonel Dacre went through the same ceremony of introduction with Julian ; who, by two of the ladies, at all events, was received more in accordance with what they knew to be Colonel Dacre’s affection for him than with his own claims as a stranger.

Olivia straightway fell in love with young Mr. Farquhar. This white-haired Olivia was far more susceptible and tender of heart than the dark-haired woman of many years ago had been. It was little Alice who had changed and softened Olivia. The child's worshipful love for Olivia had stimulated Olivia to starve her faults and to nourish her virtues, that she might be something less unlike what "the child" loved her as being. There was something, Olivia thought, very winning in the appearance, but still more in the manner, of this dark loving eyed, broad white browed, gentle, but deep voiced, tall, slight, rather boyish-looking "young Julian;" something, too, which appealed to the motherliness in her, reminding her of what her Walter had been at the same age —her Walter, whom she had loved for his dead mother, as well as for herself. And

this lad, too (so white-haired Olivia called him), was fatherless and motherless, as her Walter had been. Even had he had no charm of face and no fascination of manner, Olivia's heart would, probably, have warmed to him, and he had both.

Before they had talked together a quarter of an hour, Olivia's captivation was complete. They talked exclusively of her brother ; and the earnest tones of Julian's voice, and the fire that woke in the solumbrous depths of his eyes as he spoke, each word of speech being praise, of Colonel Dacre, made Olivia's liking for the speaker rapidly change to love.

Alice was close to Olivia's side, listening. Grace was talking with General Burmander and her uncle, and pouring out coffee, at another part of the room. Young Julian chiefly noticed Alice to remark how her ethereal infantine bloom, about which the

Spring twilight, that was being prolonged by moonlight, seemed to linger, threw into stronger relief, by contrast, Miss Dacre's curiously-interesting face, whose clear Spanish darkness (in which shone those inspired-looking eyes, and that youthfully and most rarely-beautiful mouth), so strangely crowned and framed by the abundance of silken silvery hair, struck him as more remarkable than anything he had ever seen either in life or on canvas.

Before they had talked together ten minutes, young Mr. Farquhar had felt in Olivia enough likeness to her brother to make him love her and wish for her love. Towards Grace, who, as she dispensed the coffee, complacently accepted, and with dignified playfulness returned, the rather heavy badinage of the rough, good-humoured old General, Julian now and then sent a glance of worshipful admiration;

while Grace, after her first investigating scrutiny of "the boy Uncle Walter makes such a fuss about," having superciliously decided that he was just "an elegant little dandy," with nothing in him, vouchsafed him no further notice.

"Now, young sir," by-and-by shouted the General, in a voice to be heard by a regiment, "we must be going. Marian, you know," was added with a significant softening of the voice, "will be sitting up till we come home; and she's by no means over her journey yet, poor soul!"

When Colonel Dacre returned to the drawing-room, after having seen his friends ride off, it was in a clear, glad voice that his "Well?" challenged expression of opinion concerning them. And yet, as he had paused a moment or two at his gates, in the sweet-brier and honeysuckle fragrance of the moony May night, watching

them along the road, that same imperious pull at his heart-strings, of question, warning, or prophecy, had made itself felt.

The room, in which no windows had been shut and no lights kindled, was almost as flower-fragrant as the night outside. Colonel Dacre gravitated by instinct to where, in her light dress, almost invisible against the white curtains, Alice stood, he put his arm round her, and gathered her closer than it was his wont to do. He continued to hold her against his heart, as a talisman, a charm against that imperious and mysterious warning.

“ Well ?” came again from Colonel Dacre.

Alice said nothing. Some vague wonder at some difference in him, something to be felt, not understood, held her quiet and breathless-feeling within his arm. Olivia spoke,

“ He reminds me of what you were at

his age, Walter. I need say no more than that. You know what that means."

Grace had more to say, praising General Burmander, but speaking of "that young Mr. Farquhar" in a spirit that made Colonel Dacre's brows contract with displeased wonder, and his voice sound almost severe.

"If I am not mistaken, you didn't once speak to Mr. Farquhar?"

"Oh! yes, indeed I did, uncle. I asked him to take some coffee, and he informed me, in the most confidential manner, that he never took coffee, which of course it was most deeply interesting to me to know."

Grace spoke with exceeding pertness.

"Well," said Colonel Dacre, "had I not noticed that Julian looked at you with very decided admiration, and would gladly have availed himself of any opportunity you

had chosen to give him of improving your acquaintance, I should have supposed that some imagined slight of his had given the acrid accent to your remarks. As it is, I excuse you on the ground that as Julian Farquhar is as unlike Tom Blatchford as it's possible for two fine and nice young fellows to be you cannot be expected to admire him."

"As if that had anything to do with it, Uncle Walter," said Grace with a toss. "I'm not such a goose as to require all men to be like Tom; neither am I, as you know, so contented with Tom as to be likely to be such a goose."

"I can hardly think it is because young Julian is dear to me, Grace, that you have set yourself to sneer at him. Where, then, am I to look for a reason? Your aunt Olivia talked with pleasure and interest to young Mr. Farquhar. How am I to ac-

count for your speaking of him as if he were beneath your notice?"

"To what fool wouldn't Aunt Olivia talk or listen with pleasure and interest, while the talk was about you, was praise of you, Uncle Walter?"

"There's something in that, certainly," laughed Colonel Dacre. "But not anything appropriate in this case. My young friend is as far as possible from being a fool—on the contrary he is as richly gifted intellectually as physically. You can't deny that he is a handsome fellow, I suppose, Grace?"

"Delightfully 'interesting-looking,'" said Grace; "but I have a special aversion to interesting-looking young men, though they are popularly supposed to be particularly fascinating."

"You mean that you think him effeminate. He is the bravest fellow I know! and

I have seen him, he not being a soldier, exposed to danger, under circumstances to try the cool courage of the toughest old soldier, and neither blench nor falter. He is a hero every inch of him, God bless him ! Then he is the most unselfish fellow, and the most affectionate imaginable. He once nursed me through a fever—Olivia knows about it—as I should have thought only a woman who loved me could have done.” Involuntarily his arm pressed Alice a little closer as he said, “A woman who loved me.”

“I can only say, Uncle Walter, that he should be your own brother, or your son, if he is what you describe him.”

“Ah, Miss Grace, you think to stop my mouth by flattery—but I have not done ! I choose to tell you a little more of my young Julian, whom, for some inscrutable reason, you choose to depreciate. He is

the most graceful and the most fearless rider I know, one of the best of shots. You should have seen him on a tiger-hunt to understand what his nerves are worth. He is something of an artist, something of a musician, to my judgment altogether a poet. And of music, painting, and poetry he is considered, for his years, an acute critic."

"An infant Prodigy! or an Admirable Crichton!" Grace said calmly, with as close an approach to a sneer as her affectionate respect to her uncle permitted her to be capable of. "To my mind, uncle, you have indeed condemned him. 'Jack of all trades, and master of none,' would be a vulgar, but, I expect, a just way of describing him. I really can't imagine how you can have become so infatuated about such a mannikin."

"Grace, I really am ashamed of you," said her aunt. "You let your temper—for

temper is at the bottom of it—lead you too far. If you were a few years younger, I should just send you to bed."

"Where I am wishing myself," said Grace, veiling with her hand a real or an imaginary yawn.

"If I have said anything about Julian to give the idea of a *petit maître*, or, as Grace says, mannikin, I have done him great injustice and misled you. No doubt he has his faults, and he is too young for either faults or virtues to have fully developed. But it is certain that he is one of those peculiarly gifted beings, of whom there are a few, in whom all grace and all goodness seem natural, and who succeed in all they undertake."

"Anyone who loved you well enough to understand you, Walter—I, for instance—might have spoken just so of you when you were the same age."

“Alas, then, for the difference between promise and performance!” commented Colonel Dacre with a humorous shrug.

Alice, emboldened by the duskness, and touched in a way she did not understand by something in his tone, turned her face from looking out, and bent her head down and kissed his hand.

“And when,” Grace asked, “am I to see this Phoenix again? I will observe him more carefully, and try to get over his elegant appearance, and to do him less injustice.”

“Julian will come and stay here by-and-by, as soon as Mrs. Burmander is better.”

“What is he to the Burmanders, or they to him?”

“There is no relationship, except such as one might call conferred adoption.”

“What a mysterious phrase! Pray, what may it mean, Uncle Walter?”

“It means that, on the sudden death in action of Captain Farquhar, whose adopted son Julian was, the Burmanders became the boy’s guardians.”

“He was only Captain Farquhar’s adopted son! His relation, though, of course, having the same name. What puzzles me is——”

“Enough questioning now, Grace. You have not behaved so amiably that I should feel bound to gratify all your curiosity.”

“That is true, uncle. Well, I can only say that, if there is some mystery about young Mr. Farquhar, this gives him the finishing touch of perfection, viewed from the point of fitness to be a hero of romance. Not one of the burly, boisterous, if you please, brutal type of heroes, but one of the interesting, elegant, languishing sort.”

“I have not said there was any mystery, young lady; I merely assert that I am not

in the humour to submit to more cross-questioning."

"And I know what that means. Good night, Uncle Walter."

"Good night, Grace. For Mr. Blatchford's sake, I hope you may be in a sweeter humour to-morrow."

Grace left the room. Olivia followed her to say,

"I wonder, Grace, what pleasure it can have given you to try to pain my brother by disparaging what he loves, and loves to hear praised."

"I wonder too, Aunt Olivia, and can only hope I won't do so another time."

Meanwhile Colonel Dacre bade Alice good night. He held her against his breast, he kissed her forehead, her mouth, her eyes, and then, when he let her go from his arms, her hands. There was something so different in this "good night"

from their usual good nights, that Alice's wonder grew to trouble. She was flushed and agitated when she got to her own room, and that night it was long before she could sleep; and when she slept, she had strange dreams—of love, and loss, and grief.

The lights were burning in Colonel Dacre's room and he was walking to and fro in it great part of that night—walking to and fro, with head bent down like a man in profound meditation.

CHAPTER III.

M R S . B U R M A N D E R .

“In a noble lady
Softness of spirit, and a sober nature,
That moves like Summer winds, cool, and blows sweetness,
Shows blessed, like herself.”

G REYTHORPE, the house Colonel Dacre had taken for his friends, who had wished to spend this Summer in his neighbourhood, was within a pleasant ride or drive from Heatherstone.

“No use to buy any place,” General Burmander had written, “for it’s impossible to know whether the air may suit Marian; in fact, so far north as you are,

it's certain to be too cold for her in Winter."

So he had written, and so he repeated in his cheery, blustering voice, though he not only knew, but knew that those to whom he spoke knew that he knew, that, in all probability, before Winter his Marian would be beyond the reach of all earthly cold or heat.

The day after the General and Julian Farquhar had been at Heatherstone, Colonel Dacre asked Alice to ride with him to Greythorpe in the afternoon. Olivia and Grace would wait to hear that the invalid was a little stronger before they called, but Colonel Dacre, between whom and Mrs. Burmander there was an affectionate attachment of long standing, had an uneasy restlessness, which he did not explain to himself, upon him, and which led him to be impatient that Alice and Mrs. Burman-

der should be known to each other. He proposed to leave Alice with the sick lady for the afternoon, while he rode over to Monkstowe, where he had business, with the General. That Alice could tire her—that Alice could do anything but good to anybody—did not occur to him.

Alice, always timid with strangers, was secretly alarmed at this proposed arrangement, but she was a very meek and docile little lady as yet, and seldom, if ever, thought of refusing to fall in with any wish of Colonel Dacre's, or even of asking him to modify any plan. His will was law for her as yet. "As yet!" But we may parody the proverb of the ancients, and say, "Let no woman's temper be pronounced good till she die." As yet, what had Alice ever had to try her? She was a petted white dove, whose feathers no wind had been suffered to ruffle.

In spite of her timidity, Alice was very happy to-day. The ride to Greythorpe was a very happy one. Colonel Dacre talked to her in the way she loved him to talk, telling her of the things that interested him, serious things, explaining to her his political opinions, and describing to her his plans for the improvement of the dwellings, and for the better education of the children of his poor neighbours, quietly, by implication, associating her with all his schemes for good work in the future. Alice quite forgot any perplexing impression left from yesterday. Alice always felt proud and pleased when Colonel Dacre talked to her as he did to-day—as he might have talked to Olivia—as to a woman who could understand and even help him, whom he thought worthy to be his companion, his friend—as something more than little Alice, the mere child, whom he loved far too much.

Colonel Dacre should have been encouraged to talk to Alice in this way by the soft earnestness of her listening face, and by the sympathetic intelligence of her few comments and questions, confirming what Olivia often said about her, that she was thoughtful and sensible beyond her years. Yes, that ride was a very happy ride—that was not surprising. But what did surprise Alice was that the afternoon, when she was left with Mrs. Burmander, was also a happy afternoon. She had not been five minutes with the sick lady before she forgot her usual timidity, and felt at home, and lovingly anxious to be of use.

Mrs. Burmander was a good deal younger than her husband, and yet her feeling for him was in many respects more like a mother's than a wife's. She loved him with a pitying, protecting sort of love. The thought of his helpless, lonely grief,

when she should be taken, was the bitterness of death for her. She was a truly religious, a spiritual-minded woman, for whom death had no other bitterness and no terror ; not that she desired it, for, in spite of her constant and frequently severe suffering, the love of those who loved her, and the beauty of the world, made life dear. The expression of sweet patience and quiet endurance made her face beautiful, with a sort of beauty that immediately drew Alice towards her.

From three o'clock till nearly five Alice and Mrs. Burmander were left undisturbedly together ; then Mr. Farquhar came into the room where they were, bringing with him two or three very perfect early roses, which he had just gathered from the garden, and, on a plate of green leaves, a few strawberries from the forcing-house.

“ Those roses should be for my little

friend—one of them, at least—this just blush-tinted white bud," said Mrs. Burmander.

Julian offered it to Alice with the sweet-natured but condescending smile he might have had for a child. He thought of Alice as "a little girl" to be patronized.

"Please let it stay with the others. It is so lovely, and it would die before I got home," Alice said.

With another smile Julian took it back. He put the roses in a little vase, which he filled at a small fountain on the lawn outside; this, and the strawberries on their plate of green leaves, he set on a tiny table, which he brought close to Mrs. Burmander's sofa; then, bending over Mrs. Burmander, with the gentlest of voices, the most loving of looks, Julian softly laid his hand on her forehead.

"It is hot, Nantie; you are tired. I am

afraid you have been talking too much. You must rest now, and let me try and entertain Miss Fairfax. Let me lower your couch and move your pillows. Only yesterday you said I understood better than anybody else how to make your position easy."

"That is quite true, dear boy. I shall be glad you should move me now. If I am tired, however, it is only with pleasure. My little new friend has been most sweet and good to me. Perhaps she has revived a little my old, old longing to have a daughter of my own." Then, as she sank back upon the re-arranged pillows, closed her eyes and folded her hands, as if for sleep or prayer, she added, in an only just audible voice, "However, soon I shall have rest from all vain longings and all pain—so I trust, at least, through God's love and for Christ's sake."

Possibly Grace would have found fresh ground for scoffing at Julian, had she been witness of the girl-like deft aptitude (to the aid of which, however, came masculine strength, as he supported the sick woman with one arm while the other re-arranged her pillows) of his tendance of Mrs. Burmander. Not so Alice, she neither scoffed, admired, nor wondered, just accepted all she saw as simply natural.

“Now, Miss Fairfax,” said Julian, standing in front of her, smiling down on her, “you and I will amuse each other while she rests. Do you know the gardens here? May I have the pleasure of taking you round them? They are very charming in their way, though not so delightful as Heatherstone.”

“Don’t run off with her, Julian,” pleaded a faint voice from the sofa. “I shall like to listen while you two talk.”

Julian, on this, seated himself on a low chair near Alice, who, shy little soul, shrank back a little, as he bent forward, leant his elbow on his knee, pushed the dark hair back from that smooth, broad, white forehead of his, and evidently wondered what there could be for them to talk about. Alice began, saying penitently, almost in a whisper,

“I am so very sorry if I have tired Mrs. Burmander.”

“She is weaker than usual just now, not having yet got over the fatigue of her long journey. She is accustomed, too, to be so very quiet—quite too much alone. But I am sure your society will be a great pleasure to her. I can see that it has been so to-day, though she is over-tired now.”

“Another time I will be very careful. Of course to-day I did not know.”

“Of course you did not.” He assented,

with re-assuring patronage, and rather absently. His eyes were fixed on that pale worn face which, now the lids were closed, looked so death-like. "By-the-by," he added, with more animation, "has her maid brought her anything this afternoon?—wine or tea? Marker is rather forgetful."

"She has had nothing since I have been here," Alice answered.

"Ah! that is why I am unusually tired," Mrs. Burmander said, opening her eyes. "They have forgotten to bring me any tea. I am wanting my tea."

"It is very careless of Marker to forget." That it would not be pleasant to displease Mr. Farquhar was a thought which occurred to Alice as he rose to ring the bell.

Marker came.

"You have forgotten your mistress's tea; she is exhausted by the want of it," was said in a tone of cold gentleness,

through which the woman was intensely conscious of reproof.

Her face flushed all over with self-vexation.

“*I am sorry!*” was all she said. And she repeated, “*I am sorry!*” when, some ten minutes after, she re-appeared with the tray.

Julian then gave her a kind word, which brought the tears into her eyes, and sent her away, more than ever determined never again to be so careless. It was Mr. Farquhar who poured out the tea and waited upon Mrs. Burmander and Alice, raising the invalid’s couch again, not omitting any possible service.

Mrs. Burmander said to Alice,

“I’m sure, little friend, you must think it ungrateful of me to wish for a daughter, when I have in Mr. Farquhar son and daughter in one. But I have not always had him.”

Julian acknowledged this loving speech by two or three gentle touches on the soft brown hair, which should have been grey, but that it was of a shade of colour which often remains unchanged till very late in life.

After having taken her tea Mrs. Burmander seemed to revive and to be inclined to chat again.

“And you, little Alice,” she said, “forgive me, dear child, but that is how I have chiefly heard you spoken of, and I have heard you spoken of a good deal—you, like Julian, have never known father or mother.”

“I have never felt the want of a mother,” Alice answered, with soft fervour, thinking gratefully of the, if possible, more than mother’s love she had received from Olivia.

“Nor, I am sure, of a father,” Mrs. Burmander said; “except that Colonel

Dacre has been so little at home. There is a fund of tenderness in his nature that would make him a most loving father to such a dear little gentle thing as you." She turned to Julian, without waiting for any answer from Alice, and added, "Do you know, Julian, I sometimes fancy there must be a considerable likeness between you and Colonel Dacre—so often I am reminded of him by you, or by you of him."

Julian was occupied in wondering what it was in Mrs. Burmander's first words that had made Alice blush so overpoweringly, and it was easy to see, for the tears had come into her eyes, so painfully. While this wonder still occupied him, though some minutes and some further talk had passed, the General and Colonel Dacre returned. They were all for a few minutes, but only very few, round the invalid couch,

Julian gravely watched the encounter of eyes, and of smiles, between Alice and the Colonel. A new idea about them had entered Julian's head. He pronounced it absurd, quite too absurd, and yet couldn't shake it off. It made him grave, for it gravely displeased him.

"Kiss me, little Alice, and come again very soon," the sick woman said at parting. "You will bring your dear child again very soon, won't you?" she added, appealingly, to Colonel Dacre.

"I cannot promise to bring her very soon, dear friend; but no doubt she will come. I find I must go to town to-morrow, and I may be detained some days."

Julian noticed Alice's look of startled surprise, and the peculiar expression by which Colonel Dacre answered it, explaining,

"I didn't know this myself, Alice, till I

got to Monkstowe. I will tell you all about it as we ride home."

Nothing escaped the grave notice of Julian's eyes. His watch was a pained and jealous one. The idea which was gaining ground with him displeased him, because it seemed unworthy of Colonel Dacre. "In love!" "At his age!" "And with such a child!" Julian was roused by hearing Colonel Dacre say,

"I can see that Julian is thinking we ought to go—that we are over-tiring you." And Colonel Dacre bent over and kissed the shadowy hand held out to him.

Julian went with Alice and Colonel Dacre to the door. He watched the Colonel mount Alice, not offering to help, except by his hand on her horse's rein; and he was satisfied of the truth of his suspicion.

"Have you been quarrelling with Julian

Farquhar, Alice? I don't know when I have seen him look so gloomy," Colonel Dacre asked, as soon as they were out of hearing.

"No, indeed, he has been most pleasant and kind. But now, Lonel, tell me——"

They rode, till they were out of sight, in evidently earnest talk, and neither of them looked back to where Julian stood watching, with that ordinarily so bright broad brow strangely overclouded.

"Yet what is it to me?" he said, in self-remonstrance. "I suppose he thinks it a good provision for the child. Perhaps he doesn't think of himself at all—which would be just like him. And yet it seems to me he loves her."

Julian was feeling, whether he knew it or not, as a son feels who fears his father is about, according to his views, "to make a fool of himself,"—to throw himself away.

“Loves her!—loves that little childish, undeveloped creature! He who has gone through life without loving, and whose large and noble nature I should have said would have been so hard to satisfy! What can he hope from her of sympathy or companionship? No doubt she is an interesting girl—interesting in the way of promise, as a child is; but while he waits for her Spring to change to Summer he will have Winter upon him.”

Julian took a meditative, melancholy stroll among the lawns and shrubberies before he went in to dress for dinner, and came to the knowledge of the fact that his grief, annoyance, distaste, whatever it might be called, was not unselfish. They had been so much to each other; they had looked forward to being, in the years to come, still more; and now it seemed to Julian that this girl-wife must push him

from his friend's hearth and heart. It was a shock to him—a something incongruous and out of harmony—something that made him knit his brows each time the thought of it recurred.

Meanwhile, General Burmander had seated himself on a low seat by his wife's couch. Holding her hand in his, quite cautiously, lest he should damage so frail a thing, he talked to her of the afternoon, repeating any detail he thought likely to interest her. He spoke in the curious, hoarse, uncertain tones his poor rough voice took when he tried to speak softly.

He thought her looking better to-day, and so dared sit beside her; sometimes he could not trust himself alone with her. He had been specially warned against agitation, as likely to shorten her life, and there were times when some expression of her face, or some tone of her voice, would oblige him

to leave her side precipitately, so overwhelming would be the impulse to bury his white head in her gown, and to cry like a broken-hearted child.

“Poor Dacre!” the General by-and-by said, after a short silence, when he had pretty well exhausted the incidents of the afternoon—“poor Dacre!”

“Why do you say that, Laurence? I thought I had never seen our friend look either so happy, or so handsome, or so well, as he looked this afternoon.”

“But how long will it last, Marian? He’s in a fool’s paradise; but how soon will he be turned out?”

“How long will it last? What do you mean, Laurence?”

“You don’t mean to say you haven’t found out what my bat’s eyes have discovered? You don’t mean to say you don’t know what it is makes me say ‘poor Dacre!’

every time the thought of the man's happy face crosses me?"

"No, dear, indeed I don't."

"Why, Marian, the fellow's in love with that little girl."

"With little Alice?"

"Yes—a child young Julian treats as if she should still be in the nursery."

"Are you sure, Laurence?"

"God help him!—yes."

The dressing-bell rang, and the General, after stooping over and kissing the delicate roses of the soft old cheek, went away.

"She's better to-day!—I'm sure she's better to-day," he assured himself.

Mrs. Burmander pondered; and with Mrs. Burmander pondering and praying were not often far apart.

Mrs. Burmander did not think of the matter quite in the same spirit as did her husband and young Julian. Alice did not

seem to her such a mere child. They had had a good deal of talk in the hour or two they were together. Mrs. Burmander had drawn Alice out—she knew that in mind and heart she was not a mere child, but had sense and thought and feeling beyond anything that could be called childish. That Alice should love Colonel Dacre with love, did not seem improbable to Mrs. Burmander. She knew that to a very young girl the notion of being loved by a man no longer young and of world-wide experiences, sometimes has a subtly flattering attractiveness ; and Colonel Dacre was a man of whose love any girl or woman might be proud, and would be proud, thought Mrs. Burmander, in proportion as she was worthy of it. That Alice should love Colonel Dacre did not, therefore, seem difficult of belief to Mrs. Burmander. As to the prospects of happiness for Colonel

Dacre, if his heart were in those small hands of Alice's, she reserved judgment; but she was by no means inclined to despair, or to think meanly of them. And she could enter into the charm that Alice's mere and absolute innocence, her snow-drop white purity, must have for one who, like Colonel Dacre, had unavoidably seen much of world-worn, world-soiled women.

Mrs. Burmander said, "My poor friend," recognizing the frailty of the little bark he had freighted with all his hopes of happiness; but she believed it possible the little bark might prove brave and true, and bear its freight safely. She prayed this might prove so.

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW INFLUENCE.

“Herz, mein Herz, was soll das geben?
Was bedränget dich so sehr?
Welch ein fremdes neues Leben!
Ich erkenne dich nicht mehr.”

COLONEL DACRE was detained in London almost as many weeks as he had expected to be days. His business was connected with the philanthropic schemes in which he had interested Alice, and every evening, however late or tired he was, he wrote to Alice a full history of the day's progress or delays.

Perhaps most girls in Alice's circumstances would have been disappointed in

these letters, for those reasons which made Alice especially value them. In his occupation with the things written about, the writer seemed to lose sight of any other fact with regard to the person written to than that of the kindred interest in the subject. Except for a few words here and there these letters might have been written to Olivia, and for this, rather than for the few special words that could have been only her own, strange little Alice prized and was proud of these letters; as indeed at this time she prized and was proud of all recognition of her "grown-up" womanhood. For, no longer feeling a child—in fact, probably feeling older than she would do a few years hence—Alice sometimes suffered a little, not in her dignity, but in some indefinite sensitiveness, from being treated too much like a child. Her habit of diffident silence often placed her at a

disadvantage, and, combined with her milk-white fairness, the simplicity of her coiffure, and the fragility of her frame, to cause her to be often addressed in a tone of fond petting cajolery only fit to be used to a child.

After that first visit to Greysthorpe it came about naturally that Alice, especially during Colonel Dacre's absence from home, was a good deal with Mrs. Burmander. Two or three times a week, at least, she spent the afternoon by the sick lady's sofa, sometimes in the garden, sometimes in the pretty sitting-room that opened upon the garden. Sometimes Olivia took her, and left her there while she went on into Monkstowe. Sometimes the General fetched her.

Grace did not "take to" Mrs. Burmander; she kept out of the circle of her influence and rather sat in judgment on all she

heard of her. At first she had, for politeness sake, now and then accompanied Miss Dacre and Alice when they went to Greythorpe. But she remained graciously formal, serenely repellent, baffling Mrs. Burmander's gentle endeavour to draw her towards herself. She would have found it difficult to explain why, but at Greythorpe Grace felt entirely out of her element, and in an uncongenial atmosphere. She, therefore, decided that the atmosphere there was morbid ; that Mrs. Burmander was a sentimentalist, who took overstrained unreal views of things, and from whom she, Grace Dunn, a healthy-minded, practical, sensible young woman, did well to hold aloof. Grace had good feeling enough to abstain from ridiculing young Mr. Farquhar's tender devotion to his dying friend, but it was not to her taste, it was girlish (in Grace's mouth a very contemptuous phrase) ; if she had

spoken out the thought of her heart she would have pronounced it “mawkish.”

So, “nobody wants me there, and I don’t care to go there,” came to be Grace’s answer when a visit to Greythorpe was proposed; although Olivia assured her she had certainly one profound admirer in that house.

Miss Dacre had noticed Mr. Farquhar’s devout observance of Grace, whom he credited with all kind of ideal perfection, and whose stately, womanly majesty of manner and of movement awed him with a sense of his own slight boyish worthlessness; while towards Alice he preserved the protecting and patronizing air of an “elder and better.”

Julian and Alice were both too young to feel the charm of each other’s youth, though, no doubt, after a time, it helped to draw them together—to set them at ease

one with the other, giving, for a time, the equal, playmate sort of feeling.

Alice was strangely happy during those hours she spent alone with Mrs. Burmander, happy and sad. They were emotional hours ; hours when the hidden secrets of life and of the heart seemed drawn towards the surface. Mrs. Burmander spoke much and familiarly of the approach of death. It seemed to be to her a relief and satisfaction to have some one to whom she dared speak, without fear of producing painful agitation, of what was always occupying her thoughts. She had such a serene and untroubled faith as few of us attain and hold on to. For her it seemed as if in the hour of death there could be no terror, because no possibility of sinking beyond the consciousness of God's present love. Alice was profoundly and intensely influenced and affected by all she heard ; her soul grew and

developed during those hours by the sick lady's couch, and her religious life became more vivid and tangible.

Once or twice young Mr. Farquhar, breaking in upon these conferences, surprised the soul, as it were, in Alice's face, and wondered.

Julian would not be altogether banished for long from his friend's side, even when Alice was there. He had been so accustomed for the last two years, ever since the fatal turn of her illness, to spend much time with her, talking to her, reading to her, playing to her, writing notes for her, rendering almost all the services a loving and devoted daughter might have rendered, that now, when, in all probability, the time was short in which he would be able to do anything for her, he was jealous of interference with the monopoly of his privileges.

Even when Alice was there the accustomed reading often went on.

“It keeps her from talking too much,” Julian said confidentially, and half-apologetically, to Alice. He did not seem to notice how much they talked, he and Mrs. Burmander, about what he read.

Sometimes the reading was from the New Testament, or some favourite passage in the Old. Sometimes it was from Shakespeare, or from some modern poet. And when, afterwards, they talked about what had been read, the two gentle, subdued voices, one richly mellow, the other soft and silvery, made subtly penetrating music in Alice’s heart. In this manner she came to know more of Julian’s inner life and nature than she might have learnt in many months in any other fashion. Alice herself was almost always entirely silent,

but she was not allowed to feel shut out. Mrs. Burmander would always have her sit close, where she could hold her hand.

It happened to Julian one day to be absolutely startled by the intensity and intelligence he found in Alice's fair face, on which his eyes, lifted from what he was reading, had fallen, quite without intention, just as they might have fallen on the place she filled had it been empty. After that he unconsciously acquired a habit of watching for the recurrence of some such expression ; but, after that, Alice's lashes dropped, and soft colour rose in her face when he glanced towards her, and he never saw that look again ; at least, not till long after, and in quite different circumstances.

With Alice, as she sat and listened to these readings and these talks, it was something as it had been in the May twilight that evening, when she had just ended her

poem: a curious straining towards something, an impalpable, unattainable something, which should be at once the meaning and the essence of all truth and beauty —a something that ever, as she seemed about to touch it, floated from her into infinity.

And Alice generally returned to Heatherstone from these visits feeling strangely sad, happy, restless, at peace; in short, all in a tremor and vibration of soft subdued excitement.

And why?

CHAPTER V.

AT THE BREAKFAST-TABLE.

JULIAN'S promised visit to Heatherstone was the subject of conversation at the breakfast-table there on the first morning after Colonel Dacre's return from London. Alice believed he would not come, would not leave Mrs. Burman-der; but she said nothing, not wishing to forestall Colonel Dacre's disappointment, if he had to be disappointed. He spoke of

it confidently, as a settled matter, saying,

“I know, Olivia, I may rely on you to do all in your power to make Julian’s visit pleasant to him. I say the same to Alice.”

The smile that went with the naming of Alice’s name made the saying of it a caress.

“I suppose, Grace, I can only hope from you that you won’t do anything to make it unpleasant.”

“If I were Alice, Uncle Walter, I should be quite inclined to be jealous of your affection for Mr. Farquhar!”

“If I were Tom, Grace,” broke in Miss Dacre, mischievously, “I should be inclined to be jealous of the admiring looks directed towards you at every opportunity by this same Mr. Farquhar. I think your engagement should be made known before Mr. Blatchford and Mr. Farquhar meet. You are sailing under false colours at present.”

“ Mine is not the only engagement that should be made known! I am not the only person sailing under false colours!” answered Grace. Colonel Dacre looked disturbed and keenly inquiring, but Grace re-assured him, as unintentionally as she had disturbed him, adding saucily, “ It would be only humane of Uncle Walter to save the ladies of this neighbourhood the trouble of vainly spreading nets for ‘ that handsome interesting Colonel Dacre,’ as I have heard him called more than once by those who have hoped I would repeat their words to him.”

“ All in good time, Grace.”

“ As to my engagement,” continued Grace, assuming an air of supreme indifference, as she gave earnest attention to the equal spreading of the butter on her toast, “ I really am not quite sure it still exists. It is some days since I last saw Mr. Blatch-

ford, and my last words to him were to tell him that I thought everything between us had better come to an end."

"Words you did not, I am sure, this time any more than on any former occasion, wish him to act upon."

"Indeed, uncle, I have quite made up my mind that I will die an old maid sooner than marry a man who leads so ill-regulated a life. Tom doesn't show the slightest disposition to conform to my wishes. I have never known him wilder, nor heard more queer stories about him, than during the last few months." Some quizzical expression in Colonel Dacre's eyes making Grace feel malicious, she went on to say, "As to your little pet, Mr. Farquhar, he is quite welcome to admire me if he pleases. The admiration of such a boy can be nothing to me, nor, foolish as Tom is, could he be foolish enough to be jealous of Mr. Farquhar!"

“That is an exceedingly ridiculous speech, Grace!” There was an angry sparkle in Colonel Dacre’s eyes as he said this. “Julian is no ‘boy,’ he is in years some few older than you are, and in cultivation, in knowledge of the world, and in experience of life, he is much your superior. As to his being ‘little,’ he is considerably above the middle height, as tall, though, perhaps, not quite so broad and stout as your Tom, who is undeniably a fine fellow.”

“All the same there is a ‘small’ effect about him.”

“Excuse me, Grace, if I tell you that something lately is very much spoiling your temper. In the course of the day I should like to have a little serious talk with you, to ask you a few questions. Afterwards I will have an interview with Mr. Blatchford. It seems to me, my dear girl, that you are

mismanaging your own affairs, and running considerable danger of spoiling all your chances of happiness. I have interfered with you very little hitherto, Grace, because I did not think you far wrong in your own opinion of yourself, as a sensible young woman. But it seems to me that the time is come when I must assert my authority as your guardian."

Alice turned quite pale for Grace. Grace turned rather pale for herself. Colonel Dacre looked resolute, and spoke resolutely. But Grace answered,

"I shall be very happy to hear anything you have to say, Uncle Walter, and to answer any questions I am able to answer. But if I am mismanaging my own affairs, I am afraid it will not be in your power to improve them. The state of the case is just this: we parted in great anger on both sides, as I believe righteous anger on

mine, some days since, and I have not seen Mr. Blatchford from that time."

"And you have repented, Grace, of your righteous anger?"

"By no means. I certainly have not repented. I would repeat to Tom now what I told him then, that I consider his behaviour to be often of such a kind as to make it all but impossible that any girl with proper self-respect should allow her name to be associated with his."

"In spite of that saving 'all but,' it seems to me that, unless you know of things which I have not heard even hinted, you speak with a monstrous sort of exaggeration of Tom's faults or foibles, for which only angry jealousy could possibly account."

"Jealousy!" interrupted Grace, with an angry flush and a toss of her head—"I could never condescend to be jealous.

Jealousy is a thing I don't understand. If a man gave me cause for jealousy, I shouldn't be jealous—I should simply not care anything more about him."

Without noticing this interruption, Colonel Dacre continued, not quite without hidden malice,

"Tom Blatchford may not be, like Julian Farquhar, a highly-refined and cultivated gentleman, whose intellect and taste would alone suffice to keep him from anything verging on low dissipation; but he is, at all events, a manly, honest, honourable fellow, most unlikely to be mixed up in anything disgraceful. He is——"

"Worth a thousand of your finikin fine Julians," broke passionately from poor Grace. Then she flushed again, so hotly this time that her eyes filled with tears, and flashing a defiant glance against the involuntary smiles of Olivia and of Alice,

exclaimed, “ You are all in league against me!—you are all most cruel !” and burst out crying.

Such an outbreak of temper and feeling was very rare in Grace. Alice got up, put her arms round her, and kissed her, whispering,

“ Dear Grace, we didn’t mean to pain you. Don’t think we are cruel. I couldn’t help smiling, for I was so glad to hear you speak up in that way for Mr. Blatchford. We all love you dearly—you know we do.”

But Grace put Alice’s arms away, and left the room ; just what Colonel Dacre in his masculine distaste for “ a scene ” had been about to do.

“ I often wonder how it will end,” said Olivia.

“ If I were Tom, I should be tempted to end it summarily—to run away with Grace, and marry her against her will. In my

capacity of guardian, I can hardly recommend this, can I, Olivia?"

"You certainly cannot."

"The attachment is of too long-standing and is too deep-rooted for either of them to be happy without the other; the only happy end, therefore, must be marriage. Perhaps if I forbid Tom the house, and pretend to insist the engagement should be broken off, this might bring Grace to her senses."

"Not a safe experiment to try," said Olivia. "I often wonder at Grace's hardness towards poor Tom," she went on, smiling at herself. "I have a decided weakness for Tom—he is so kindly, so honest, so hearty, last, not least, so handsome. 'Such a thundering fine fellow!' as one of his friends described him. There never is, and when he was a boy, there never was, anything small, or mean, or cruel about any of his mischief. And with

all his seeming roughness he was then, as he is now, so tender-hearted. Don't you remember, Walter, my telling you how he cried himself ill when he was quite a big boy, and one from whom no pain or punishment of his own could bring a tear, because in some wild play of his Grace got badly hurt? She has the scar on her temple now."

"I remember."

"If Grace could behave now at all in the same spirit she showed then, they might be very happy. With the blood streaming down her face, she kept saying, 'Please don't cry, Tom!—it don't hurt much—it was my fault—please don't cry, Tom!'"

"If I am not mistaken," said Colonel Dacre, "here is that hero himself."

A few moments after, the room door opened rather noisily, and Mr. Blatchford came in.

“Where’s Grace?” was his concerned question, repeated anxiously, after he had exchanged cordial greetings with Colonel Dacre, Olivia, and Alice. “Where’s Grace? —not ill?”

“She was here ten minutes since. The truth is, we have all been so unkind to her this morning that she went crying to her own room.”

“Unkind to Grace!—all of you!—so unkind as to make Grace cry!” Hot anger flushed the fresh-complexioned face; then the speaker burst out laughing, and said, “I don’t believe you, Miss Dacre. You are joking, or, at all events, you yourself haven’t been unkind to Grace, nor has Colonel Dacre. It must be Alice—she looks so savagely inclined.” He laughed again, louder, at the idea of cruelty from Alice to anyone or anything.

This laughter, mounting from open win-

dow to open window, reached, and did not mollify, Grace.

“But tell me really, though,” he asked, with sudden seriousness, “is anything the matter with Grace? Has she one of her headaches? Has she really been crying? It takes a good deal to make Grace cry.”

Colonel Dacre answered,

“There is, I trust, nothing serious the matter. I should like to have a talk with you presently; but first, won’t you have some breakfast?”

“You are quite sure there is nothing serious the matter?”

“Quite, as far as anyone can be sure of anything.”

“Then I don’t mind if I do have some breakfast. I’ve had a good swim in the river, as well as a twelve-mile ride already this morning.”

“Well done!—well done!”

"I don't know about that ; honesty compels me to mention that I was only so early because I was so late. I haven't been in bed to-night."

Mr. Blatchford subsided into a chair, and devoted himself with hearty good-will for the next quarter of an hour to the discussion of the good things on the breakfast-table. When he had breakfasted, he asked who would take a message to Grace for him. Olivia and Alice were either of them ready to do so.

"Ask her, please, to come down and see me ; tell her it is to say 'good-bye'—tell her I'm going away, off on my travels again, it's true, a real long journey."

Alice was leaving the room with this message, when Mr. Blatchford added,

"Please make her understand that I must and will see her—that if she won't come to me, I'll search the house till I find

her, and break in any door I find locked."

Here Colonel Dacre interposed.

"That is hardly a message to send by a lady to a lady. Alice may deliver the first part, if she pleases, but I don't sanction the transmission of your threat."

"It wasn't meant for a threat, I assure you, Colonel. It is the most matter-of-fact statement of my intentions—my determination."

"They are intentions that cannot be carried out in my house."

"But what am I to do? Grace I must and will see! Would you have me start off, 'it may be for years and it may be for ever,' and not have a word with Grace?"

"Here she is!" said Colonel Dacre, who faced the door, to which Tom's back was turned.

Mr. Blatchford went to meet her. He stared hard at her, trying to discover any

traces of the tears of which he had heard. He couldn't find any. Grace was looking a little paler than usual, but quite calm and dignified. She carried her head high, and by no means showed any sign of a softened mood. The intolerable idea that they had all been laughing at her was the one uppermost in her mind; to make Tom suffer for this was her resolution.

CHAPTER VI.

WRANGLING.

"This senseless woman vexes me to the heart;
She will not from my memory! Would she were
A man for one two hours, that I might beat her!"

"I THOUGHT the gentle voice, and the refined melodious laughter I heard, could be only yours!" was Grace's greeting. Then, extending her hand, while keeping him at arm's length, she added, "Good morning, Mr. Blatchford. 'How are you?' is a needless question." She could not make the glance she cast at his fresh healthy face quite as coldly contemptuous as she wished, nevertheless it was anything but affectionate.

“Good morning, Miss Dunn, since it seems we are to be ceremonious.” He dropped the hand, which was struggling for freedom, and Grace passed on to the window, where she seated herself in her favourite chair, and took out a bit of embroidery from a work-basket lying on the little table which stood near it.

Mr. Blatchford followed her to the window, and planted himself there just opposite to her. She did not look up or notice him, but seemed engrossed by the pattern of her needle-work ; he knew, from some old experiences, that this was done to provoke him.

“I am an early visitor this morning, am I not?” he asked. “You must be surprised to see me here so early.”

“Nothing any longer surprises me in you,” was answered, without looking up.

“The fact is, I haven’t been to bed at

all to-night. It didn't seem worth while when it was full daylight, so I just had a good swim in the river, and then rode on here."

"Important affairs of some kind, or close study, kept you up, doubtless."

"Well, no, not exactly. You know I'm not given to close study, nor am I, thank goodness, much weighted with important affairs." He was trying to make his tone as cold and as careless as hers. "The fact is, we were just making a jolly night of it—about a dozen of us—over at Sharpton's place. You know Sharpton?"

"I have that doubtful honour."

"Ah, I remember, you don't like him—many women don't. But it's prejudice! He's a thorough good fellow!—we were all good fellows there! It was awfully grand! It was a moonlight night, you know, last night, and we had supper on the lawn—

startling the nightingales ; lots of champagne—more than enough for some of us, perhaps ! And how we sang ! You might almost have heard us over here !”

“ To have heard you would, no doubt, have been an inestimable privilege.”

“ I shouldn’t put it as strong as that ; but it was awfully fine. Some of the fellows had splendid voices, and the echoes from the rocks by the river were ‘ rather to be heard than imagined,’ or ‘ rather to be imagined than described,’ as the newspapers would say. Unless you’d heard it, you couldn’t fancy how fine it was !”

From Grace no answer or remark.

“ After supper,” Tom therefore continued, “ we of course had a little card-playing. Equally, of course, as it was after supper, I had my usual after-supper ill-luck. Consequently I’m a little low this morning—not only in spirits, but in funds.

And I've come to you to be cheered up."

Here Tom made a comical grimace, quite lost on the person for whom it was intended.

Grace did not look up. She worked away at her embroidery with a fierce sort of industry. Her face was cold and hard, but there was a hot surging of angry blood in her brain. Grace knew she was being defied, set at naught. She knew, or thought she knew, which had the same effect, that an intentionally over-coloured picture of the night's amusement was being presented to her. And it is probable, though Grace would never have admitted this, even to herself, that she would rather have believed that all she was told, and more than she was told, was true, and have had it confessed to her with humble penitence, and profuse protestations and promises of amendment, than suspect, as she did, that

more than the truth was being flaunted in her face. Grace presently broke the brief silence by saying, in a clear, dry voice,

“I hope, Uncle Walter, you have heard the charming description of the way last night was passed, with which Mr. Blatchford has been favouring me.”

Colonel Dacre had lingered at the table over his newspaper. Miss Dacre and Alice had left the room some moments before.

“I was reading, Grace,” he now said, laying down his paper as he spoke.

He rose from his chair and rang the bell, adding,

“I should like to see you in the library, before you leave, Blatchford; but no doubt you’ll stay to dinner, so there’s plenty of time for that. I should think, Grace, you’d better let Hicks clear the table before you enter upon any altercation, discussion, explanation, or whatever it is to be.”

Colonel Dacre left the room as the grey-headed old butler came into it. Grace, in any other mood, would have proposed that, on such a lovely Summer morning, they should go out-doors; but this would not have been consistent with the part of dignified displeasure she was enacting. She was, besides, so completely in the dark as to what Mr. Blatchford might intend her to understand from his new tone that she preferred to be quite passive. She therefore only sat still and waited, working resolutely.

For some minutes after the old servant left the room, the silence continued unbroken. Then Mr. Blatchford, who all the time stared at Grace with a comical mixture of rueful wistfulness and dogged determination, began to hum an air from a popular opera. This provoked Grace to break the silence.

“It needed only this,” she said, “to

show me that your conduct this morning is studiously and intentionally offensive. You know how I detest your habit of humming, and you know that I have a particular aversion for that tune."

"I beg your pardon, Grace. I won't say I had forgotten your presence, but you certainly seemed unconscious of mine."

"And you took that refined and agreeable way of rousing my attention!"

"By Jove, Grace, I'd defy anyone looking at you now, and hearing the sort of voice in which you speak, to believe that you love the man standing opposite to you! And yet you do love me, Grace—you know you do."

"I certainly have loved you, but love is not an incurable folly," answered Grace. She spoke without lifting her eyes; and as she spoke, turned her head a little on one side to inspect her work from a fresh

point of view, as if more interested in that than in the subject under discussion.

“Perhaps not!” Tom assented, as he made a sudden dash at Grace’s embroidery, and succeeded in snatching it from her hand.

“I don’t beg your pardon,” he said, “you ought to beg mine. I know that when you keep your eyes and your fingers busy with some infernal bit of stitching like this”—he looked at it with some tenderness, and laid it with some care out of her reach—“you mean to be provoking and insulting. You have been successful. I am provoked and insulted. Are you pleased now?”

Grace coloured furiously, but said nothing. Taking out her handkerchief, she ostentatiously occupied herself in wiping the blood from a slight needle-scratch on her finger. An instant after, before she was in the least prepared for

any such demonstration, Tom's arm was round her, holding her too tight to allow her to extricate herself, and Tom was kissing the scratched finger.

"I'm a regular brute, I know, Grace; I'm always hurting you one way or another, ever since I made this mark." And Mr. Blatchford's lips transferred themselves to the scar on Grace's temple.

Grace, whose feelings seemed much less than usual under her control this morning, taken by surprise in this way, relented. She shed a few tears, with her forehead resting against Mr. Blatchford's shoulder, before she even tried to withdraw herself from his arm. When, presently, he left her free, he threw himself into a low chair, which he pulled very close to her. The ice now was effectually thawed.

"It's quite true, Tom, that you're always hurting me," Grace said, in rather a broken

voice; "not that I call such a scratch as this a hurt, though you can be sorry about this. No, Tom, you hurt much deeper than that, and without being at all sorry."

"Only be a little kinder to me, Grace, and then see if I don't behave ever so much better when I come back. Not that I promise anything, mind you! I've sworn to myself to make no promises. But be a little kind to me to-day, anyhow, in case I never should come back."

"Where are you going?" Grace was startled and offended.

"Far enough for there to be plenty of chances of things happening that might rid you of me before I could get back again."

"I have no need to wait for chances of that kind to rid me of you, if I wished to be rid of you, I suppose, Tom?"

"Certainly not; but there are difficult-

ies in getting rid of me in other ways ! Your own heart won't let you rid yourself of me by your own act. While your Tom is alive, you will never be easy unless you are plaguing him, quarrelling with him, lecturing him, or loving him. Now, if he were dead——”

“ It would be only and always loving him ! ” interrupted Grace. “ I should forget all the ways in which he grieves and teases and humiliates me ! I should only remember how good he was to me when we were children, and that we have loved each other ever since we were children ! ” Grace’s eyes grew moist contemplating this pathetic picture of her own constancy.

“ Then, Grace, indeed I’d better make haste to be dead. For I uncommonly like the notion of your only and always loving me. But, it strikes me, it would be more sensible and comfortable, and more

altogether satisfactory, **certainly, to me,** possibly to both of us, if **you'd begin this** 'only and always' loving **me while I'm** alive. Don't you think so, **dear?** Won't you try, Grace?

His handsome face looked up at her with loving eyes from the **level of her knee**, as he lounged forward in his low chair. His voice was very **tender and persuasive.** If he had stopped **there, he might** have got a soft answer, **perhaps even a voluntary, unasked-for kiss, but he went** on to say, "Indeed, Grace, **I do believe** you can do without me **no better than** I can do without you. **Why not end all** this childish wrangling? **Let us get married,** and we shall rub on **well enough** together, for the love between us **is a real thing,** deeply ingrained—it **won't rub off** by such friction as we shall give it, **as mere varnish might."**

“ You are too confident.”

“ You surely don’t take it amiss that I should feel as confident of your love for me as I feel of mine for you ?”

“ I think your too great confidence in my love for you has been a great disadvantage to you, Tom. You make no effort to gain or to keep what you believe to be so entirely and inalienably your own.”

“ That shows how little you know of a man’s heart and a man’s life, Grace. It is in great part because you loved me that I have not gone altogether to the dogs.”

“ We won’t argue this point, Tom. I am waiting to be told where you are going, why you are going, for how long you are going, when you are going.”

“ I’m ready, willing, anxious to go nowhere, never, away from you, if only you’ll marry me off-hand.”

“ Which I certainly won’t do.”

“I’m heart-sick and weary of our late cat-and-dog life. I’m a fellow of a loving, quiet, peaceable disposition, whom this sort of thing don’t suit.”

“I’m hearing marvellous things, Tom. You of a peaceable disposition !”

“Certainly ; so far as that I wish to be at peace with the woman I love. So if you won’t marry me, I’m going first to Norway, salmon-fishing, midnight sun, and that sort of thing—where, afterwards, I don’t yet know.”

“Norway !” echoed Grace. “I thought,” there she paused—she had received a real wound, a stab, and she did not wish to show it. She had been going to say, “I thought we were to go there together, Tom,” for it had been agreed between them long ago that, when they married, they would go to Norway for their honeymoon.

“Norway first, as I said,” repeated Tom ;

“where afterwards, I don’t yet know. Of course I shall try always to keep you informed of my whereabouts.”

“Very kind, I am sure.”

“And any day you choose to write to me, ‘Come home, Tom,’ honestly meaning that when I come home you’ll marry me, you may depend upon it I’ll come just as quick as mortal measures can bring me.”

Grace meditated. She did not believe that Tom had forgotten her wish to go to Norway. She believed that he mentioned Norway as his destination to pique or to bribe her into yielding to his desire that they should be married at once.

“This is all very absurd, Tom,” Grace began.

“Just one of the things I’m so heartily tired of hearing you say, Grace. According to you, I’m always either absurd or wicked. Now I don’t find that

other people take the same view of me."

"I assure you I'm quite as tired of having to call you absurd, and to think you so, as you can possibly be of hearing yourself called so. But what you have been saying now is all quite absurd. You know you have only to submit to a very few sensible conditions, to make me two or three promises, and—"

"And you'd reward me by marrying me, Grace, I know. Well, that's reward enough for almost anything but loss of self-respect! But, Grace, I have some little pride and dignity. You don't consider these for me, so I'm obliged to consider them for myself. I'm willing to own you for my queen, but then I must be your king—not a mere slave, or even subject. Once for all, I'll not submit to conditions, nor will I bind myself by promises. A woman who don't feel she can trust to my

love, my honour, my generosity, has no right to let herself become my wife."

Tom spoke with energy. He had risen from his low chair and lounging attitude, and was now again standing right opposite to her. His head was thrown back, his attitude was firm and resolute, his face had a very determined expression. Grace, glancing up at him, thought what a splendid-looking fellow he was.

For a moment her heart quivered with doubt. Should she love Tom so well, and could she be so proud of him, if he were more yielding? And would it not be more rightly womanly, more dignified even, to give herself up to him, trusting him, as he said, rather than fight her fight out with him? These things she asked herself. She didn't speak, and Tom began again aggressively,

"Do you think, Grace, I'd keep promises

that had been extorted from me if they bound me to do or not to do things that my love for you wouldn't otherwise have bound me to do or to leave alone?"

"I thought," Grace answered rather timidly, "that you would keep your word."

"I wouldn't do for the sake of my word what I wouldn't do for your sake, and because I held it to be the right and honourable thing to do."

"Wouldn't you, Tom?"

"No. I own that you have a perfect right to refuse to marry me if you think I drink, or smoke, or gamble, or whatever it is, more than I ought; and don't go to church and think seriously of things as much as I ought. But I dispute and I deny your right to drive a bargain with me. Take me on trust, or leave me! You study your own woman's dignity so much

that I am obliged to take thought for mine as a man."

No word from Grace, who was feeling too much to know what she felt, or what she had better say.

"I am, as I said," continued Mr. Blatchford, "quite tired of things as they are—this constant off-and-on, constant wrangling and wrestling. I think we may both profit by time to reflect on what our future course shall be. Such reflections are best made under separation, at a distance one from the other. So I've arranged to sail from Hull, for Norway, to-morrow."

"Very well, Tom."

"I go to Hull this evening."

"Very well, Tom."

"When I shall come anywhere near Heatherstone, or even England again, is quite uncertain."

"Very well, Tom ; of course you must please yourself."

Grace did not, could not, would not, even now, believe that this was Tom's serious intention. Nevertheless she was frightened. She did not look up in his face, but kept her eyes upon a ring she turned round and round on her finger, as she made him her provokingly cool answers. But presently Tom's hand on her shoulder, shaking it, not too gently, made her look up.

Tom's temper got the better of him, and lost him all the advantage of his dignified attitude of some moments before. He put himself completely in the wrong, poor fellow, justified Grace to herself, and checked any disposition in her to come to terms, by abusing, in good plain language, her coldness of heart, her selfishness, her self-complacent pride. Grace pushed off his hand, and rose to leave the room. He

made a clutch at her sleeve, and tore it in trying to detain her, and so added to her sense of outrage and ill-usage, and his sense of rudeness and barbarity.

Left alone, Mr. Blatchford immediately quieted down.

“I’m afraid I’ve done it this time,” he said to himself dolefully. He lingered and listened for half-an-hour, thinking Grace might relent and return. Then he rang the bell and sent a message by a servant, asking if Miss Dunn could see him again for one minute.

Miss Dunn was particularly engaged, he was told. Then he wandered despairingly into the garden to look for Miss Dacre and Alice, to wish them “good-bye.”

Colonel Dacre saw him from one of the library windows, and called to him. But Mr. Blatchford sulkily but respectfully declined to be talked to to-day.

“Grace will tell you about it. I’ve made a brute of myself—and there’s nothing left for me to do but to go.”

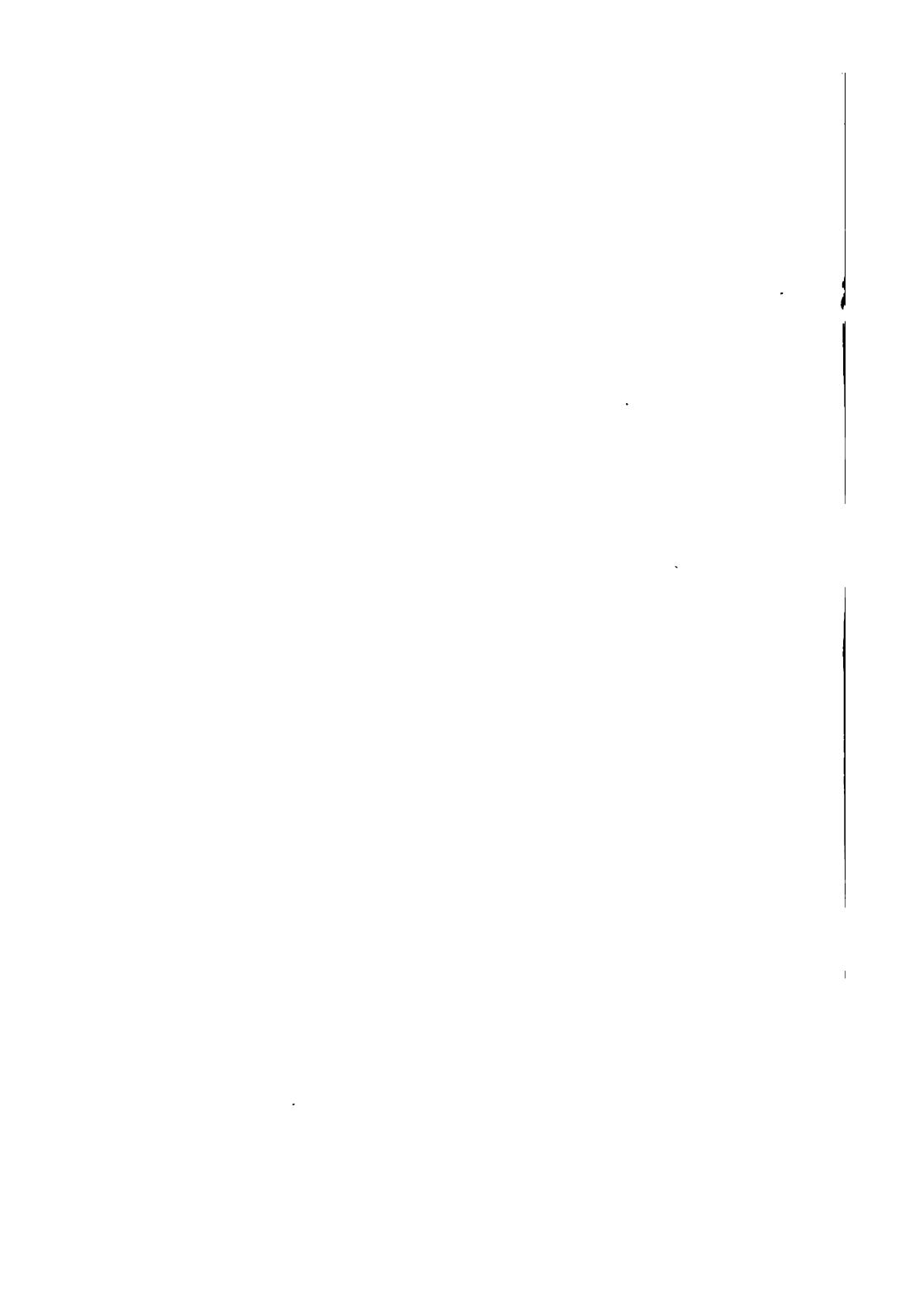
When he found Olivia and Alice he took Alice aside, and, holding her hand in his, and bending so low that his lips almost touched her hair, implored her to use all her influence to soften Grace towards him. Then he got his horse and rode away.

Grace, hidden behind her lace curtains, watched him out of sight, with a very heavy and sore heart.

“Poor fellow,” she said, “how crest-fallen he looks! When he comes back this evening I will be very kind to him.” Her heart, however, did not believe that he would come back. And her heart was right. Neither that evening, nor for many an evening.

BOOK III.

YOUNG JULIAN.



CHAPTER I.

BEFORE HIS ARRIVAL.

“Hold your right there!
Love and high rule allow no rivals, brother.”

COLONEL DACRE interested himself in so minute a way in the preparations made for receiving young Mr. Farquhar at Heatherstone, that he incurred the loving and yet rather impatient laughter and raillery of his sister, who told him his cares were more like those of a loving mother for a daughter than of one man for another. He took her raillery meekly, and answered to it apologetically, almost shyly.

“ Well, Olivia, it is not a thing to be reasoned about, or for which I can account, but I have that sort of affection for Julian which makes me feel as if nothing could be too choice or too precious to be given to him.”

“ Nothing ?” questioned Olivia, fixing him with her bright eyes.

“ Possibly I should make one reservation,” he answered, and, as he so answered, the bronze of his face took a redder tinge.

“ Indeed, I should hope so ! ‘ Love and high rule allow no rivals, brother,’ ” was the energetically spoken response.

Colonel Dacre looked as if he had more to say on the subject, and were about to say it.

The brother and sister were looking through the rooms which had been prepared for Julian, just before he was expected.

Colonel Dacre, who had been walking up

and down, came to a pause, seemed to fall into a brown study, and, perhaps, forgot what he had been about to say.

Rousing himself presently, rubbing his hands across his eyes and his forehead. "Yes, no doubt it is strange!" he answered to his own thoughts.

"What is strange, Walter?"

"The strength of my feeling towards that boy. I doubt if I could resolve to keep anything from him the possession of which I believed to be essential to his happiness."

"But, Walter, you really must be reasonable."

"That is quite true, I really must be reasonable;" he echoed his sister's words in a manner to suggest that his thoughts had either gone before, or had loitered behind those words.

"Well," he went on presently, "I hope poor Grace, who seems terribly out-of-sorts

and irritable just now, won't make herself too disagreeable to Farquhar—not to an extent to spoil the pleasure of his visit, at all events."

"Oh! no," said Olivia, brightly, "she won't do that."

"Above all things, Olivia, don't let her touch upon the question of Julian's parentage—about which she chooses to think there is some mystery. Let her know that she will anger and grieve me almost past forgiveness if she, either maliciously or carelessly, brings this subject forward."

"She won't do that, Walter."

"I have no doubt Captain Farquhar knew every circumstance connected with Julian's birth, but, as you know, his death was sudden, without an hour's warning."

"Yet it seems to me, brother, that, if he had known anything it would add to the boy's happiness to know, he would have

taken at least as much pains to secure that the knowledge should, one day, come to Julian, as he took to secure Julian's inheritance of his property."

"One would think so. But the interests of people then, when he died, still living, may have been concerned, and he had no intimate friend of his own in reach to whom he could have confided an important secret. Who put these flowers here?" was questioned abruptly, as Colonel Dacre bent over a pretty bouquet placed on the writing-table in what was to be young Julian's study.

"Alice."

"I thought they had not been arranged by a servant."

"Alice asked me, not if I would like her to put flowers there, but if I thought you would like her to do so, so I was forced to answer 'yes.'"

“Quite right. It was very kind of Alice to think of it. But why do you imply that you would have answered differently if it had been your wish that she had consulted?”

Olivia’s bright eyes perused her brother’s face keenly, then she answered, evasively,

“If you choose to try and spoil your young friend, there is no need that we should all help you to do so.”

“Why is it, Olivia—or is it only a fancy of mine that it is so?—that while at first you took to my young friend, as you call him, in your usual warm-hearted way, you have lately seemed rather to grudge him my love and my praise? And you certainly have not seemed pleased that he should come here.”

“If this is so, can you not guess why it is so?”

“No, indeed.”

“You have no suspicion?”

“Positively none.”

“Then, you fond, foolish, noble fellow, I have nothing to tell you.”

“Inexplicable riddles are even the simplest and noblest of women!” commented Colonel Dacre, with a slight shrug. Still contemplating Alice’s nosegay, “Just Julian’s favourite flowers,” he remarked.

“There is nothing strange in that, Walter,” she said, quite sharply, “considering that they are the flowers which just now are most abundantly in season.”

“I did not say there was anything strange.” Colonel Dacre looked at her with some wonder. Then he turned to the book-shelves, “The same fairy fingers have been busy here, I think,” he said. “By chance, intuition, or sympathy, these recently-added volumes are Julian’s favourite poets.”

“Neither chance, intuition, nor sympathy,

I should say, Walter, but just knowledge. You forget how much Alice has been at Greythorpe, and how much she must have seen of Mr. Farquhar there."

" For the moment I had forgotten. She told me in her letters about the visits there, and the readings, and how much she enjoyed them."

Colonel Dacre, moving to one of the windows, immediately called his sister to his side, to admire with him the riding of young Mr. Farquhar, who, now in shadow, and now in shine, as the trees shut back the sunshine or let it through upon him, was just coming up the drive.

" With what an easy, gallant sort of grace he sits his horse, Olivia ! His hand has the lightness of a lady's, and the iron nerve of a knight's. He only needs armour and the more heroic dress, to be just the young knight, spotless and stainless—Sir

Galahad, for instance—of an old legend; or the fairy-prince of an old fairy-tale."

"At his age you were at least his equal, brother!"

"Even if that were ever so, save in your half-maternal imagination, Olivia, how long since that time is made to feel when one remembers that I might now be, as far as age goes, this fine young fellow's father."

"Hardly, Walter, or only on a scale of computation which would enable me to say I might have been his grandmother."

"Come, dear Grannie, let us down and welcome Prince Julian; and I know that, for my sake, and also for his own, when you are face to face with him, your welcome will be a right loving one."

Saying this, he threw his arm round his sister, and they went together down the broad shallow steps of the oak staircase,

the south wind blowing sunshine and sweet odours into their happy, handsome, loving faces, through the open door of the hall.

CHAPTER II.

HIS ARRIVAL.

“ God of the Spring-tide in Life’s year,
Lord of an age of purest gold,
Youth, dear to all, thou’rt trebly dear
To me that now am growing old.”

MR. FARQUHAR, when he saw the brother and sister standing together in the portico, lifted his hat, and waved it over his head, with genuine boyish glee.

“ My own welcome of myself as a guest at Heatherstone !” he laughingly explained, as he sprang from his horse, to whose head had come a groom who had been on the watch.

“It shan’t be for want of other welcome that you welcome yourself,” spoke Colonel Dacre, his hands on Julian’s shoulders. “It is indeed good to have you here!”

Over all Colonel Dacre’s face spread the illumination of earnestly affectionate pleasure; the younger face of the welcomed guest beamed with kindred feeling, and this similarity of expression made the two faces at that moment startlingly alike.

Olivia’s welcome was hardly less thoroughly cordial than her brother’s. It always happened that directly she came into personal contact with young Mr. Farquhar any slight reserve, of distrust or of disapproval, she had been keeping against him in her heart, melted away.

“That horse of yours is a perfect creature, Julian!” Colonel Dacre remarked, watching it as the groom led it off.

“It was the General’s present. I want

you to ride it. It would suit your weak shoulder far better than that hard-mouthed brute I saw you on the other day."

"If it suited me ever so well I should grudge to lose the pleasure of seeing you on it. Olivia, do you know where Alice and Grace are?"

"Very near you, Walter."

At that moment the two girls came through the hall to join the group in the portico, and to welcome Colonel Dacre's friend.

Grace, still the secret object of Julian's homage, all the more, perhaps, that she either repelled or ignored it, moving towards him with stately composure, greeted him with elaborate graciousness. Alice was at once shy and friendly in her greeting, gravitating immediately to the protecting shelter of Colonel Dacre's side; her hand, by some mutual movement of inti-

mate understanding, being drawn through his arm.

They all lingered where they were a little while.

It was a perfect Summer afternoon, of balmy air, of golden sunshine, of all delight. The scene was one of intensely peaceful and home-like loveliness. The sunshine pouring down the soft slopes of the opposite hills, filled to overflowing the intermediate valley, and seemed to run up again to lie caressingly on the Heather-stone lawns, and to glow richly on its bowers and beds and thickets of roses. A sleepy, intermittent cawing of rooks and cooing of wood-pigeons,—in the fine old trees by which the house was sheltered from the keen northern blasts that came from the distant sea across the moor,—and the noise of falling water in the depth of the valley, were the most audible sounds when human speech was silent.

“ ‘A land where it is always afternoon,’ ” quoted Julian ; whose loving-looking eyes were gazing about him lovingly.

“ Do you have any troubles here ? ” he asked ; “ especially any disputes or dissensions ? Wars and fightings among men (or women) would seem so peculiarly out of place.”

“ Greythorpe is surely quite as quiet as Heatherstone,” remarked Grace, already feeling antagonistic..

“ It does not so strike me. The situation is very different. Here you seem to live completely in a little kingdom of your own. You have a way out, down there in the south-west, where you get a bit of far distance, otherwise you seem, in a very unique manner, utterly secluded, without being shut in. Probably, however, I couldn’t have the same feeling about Greythorpe, even if the situation were similar.

I know that we have pain and trouble there; besides which, where the dear old General is there cannot be an atmosphere of delicious, soothing calm, the very poetry of repose, like this."

Grace, anxious to make some anti-sentimental demonstration in acknowledgment of what she considered an absurdly sentimental speech, was helped to an opportunity by the sounding of the first dinner-bell.

"Is that sound consistent with the very poetry of repose, Mr. Farquhar?" she asked. "Doesn't it jar upon your imaginations concerning the 'delicious soothing calm' of this lotus-eating land, where it is always afternoon? Suggesting, as it does, the horribly incongruous notion of a kitchen, a cook, a dinner, and a dining-room?"

Grace's mocking was not sweet-toned, she spoke with contemptuous asperity. Mr. Farquhar's face expressed a gentle wonder

how he had offended. He answered, with unruffled good-temper,

“I confess to an appetite which makes the suggestion of some more substantial food than lotus far from disagreeable. The bell is a mellow-toned, pleasant-sounding bell, too, disturbing the harmony of things as little as possible. I am inclined to find everything just as it should be at Heatherstone,” he added, with an affectionate smile for Colonel Dacre,

As, obeying the summons, they crossed the threshold of the house, Colonel Dacre, after a loving pressure, relinquished Alice’s hand, and, with his again on Julian’s shoulder, said,

“The heartiest of heart-felt welcomes ! Take the Spanish compliment as a sober, sincere statement, and consider me, my house, and all that is mine at your disposition, young friend.”

With a mischievous light sparkling in his eyes, Julian replied, out of careless lightness of heart, glancing at Alice as he spoke,

“With one exception I think, sir.”

Alice flushed rosy red, as he had seen her flush once before. Colonel Dacre answered, smiling, avoiding any look at Alice which might add to her embarrassment,

“I think I need make no exception. In such a case, of all or nothing, the act of reservation would imply a doubt, so it seems to me, as to whether one were really in possession of the thing reserved.”

“A very enigmatical sentence, uncle—quite beyond my understanding, though, doubtless, understood by Mr. Farquhar’s more subtle and poetical brain.”

“This way, Julian—I will show you your rooms,” Colonel Dacre said; at the foot of the stair he added, while Grace

might still be within hearing—"My niece Grace is somewhat irritable and sharp-tongued just now. You must excuse her."

Of course Julian only answered with chivalrously warm denial of having anything to excuse. As they walked along the broad corridor, lighted by large windows of stained glass at its east and west ends, Julian said,

"I mustn't forget Mrs. Burmander's message ; she petitions that you will spare Miss Fairfax to her for a few days. If this could be while I am here it would relieve the time of my absence. Nantie has taken an extraordinary affection for Miss Fairfax."

"It is not with your usual gallantry that you call it extraordinary, Julian."

Something in that simple speech of Julian's both piqued and pleased Colonel Dacre.

"I used the word thoughtlessly, and am quite ready to own that it was singularly inappropriate," Mr. Farquhar replied, with penitent eagerness, fearing that he had wounded his friend.

These two men sometimes showed a sensitiveness, each in regard to things which concerned the other, more like the sensitiveness women feel where those they love are in question, than like anything that is ordinary in friendship between men.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE TERRACE.

“That you are not another is your wrong,
And yet—I’d have that other more like you.
It is the curse of women, weak or strong,
The thing they would not is the thing they do.”

THAT dinner-time, and the evening which followed it, were among the pleasantest they any of them (except, of course, poor Grace) remembered.

After dinner they strolled up to a little rustic hut at the highest point of the grounds, where coffee and fruit had been set ready. They seated themselves, however, not within the hut, but on

the fir-tree trunks which formed the steps to it.

Julian Farquhar had the rare grace and gift of being always interested and interesting. More often than not it was rather what he drew out of other people—what he made them say—than anything he said himself, which caused those who were with him to feel him to be so delightful. It was with his heart more than with his brain that he worked his miracles of fascination. He had no vanity, and he had great tact and tenderness, and a wonderful power of ready sympathy. That he was too facile to be deep, was sometimes said of him, but unjustly, by those who, having no facility, laid claim to depth.

This evening, under Julian's influence, Colonel Dacre had come out in the most astonishing manner. Julian made him disinter half-buried experiences, revived

his memory of half-forgotten adventures and anecdotes, stimulated him to describe stirring passages of arms, in which he himself had borne a prominent part, till almost, if not quite, blushing behind his bronze, Colonel Dacre exclaimed, remonstrating,

“ Julian, Julian, you are the most subtle and stealthy of flatterers. You not only make a man praise himself, but believe in his own praises of himself. I have grown immensely in my own estimation, feel ever so much bigger a fellow, since you came into my house. As to Olivia and Alice——”

“ I assure them,” asserted Julian, smiling into Olivia’s bright pleased eyes, “ that we have kept to the dryest and most unadorned statement of facts.”

“ So I believe,” said Olivia.

And then Julian’s eyes, following the direction of Colonel Dacre’s, rested upon Alice. Alice’s intensified face, as she looked

up fondly and proudly into Colonel Dacre's, and put her soft little willing hand, half-shyly, into his, stretched out for it, struck Julian as, from the poetical and picturesque side, extremely interesting.

It was now the Midsummer twilight. There would be no darkness, for the sky was without a cloud, and the full moon was disentangling herself from the tree-fringed rim of the eastern hill. The air was full of Summer scents, from roses, lilies, honeysuckle, sweet-brier, syringas, with which mingled the aromatic odour from the fir-trees, brought out by the cool touch of evening, after the sunny heat of the day; full, too, of Summer sounds, of the last singing of blackbird and thrush, and of those less articulate chirpings, twitterings, hummings, and murmurings of Summer life subsiding to silence, more tender and more soothing than positive song, through

which whispered a little dreamy memory of wind, sighing in the tops of those fir-trees, and the tinkling fall of distant, deep-down water.

The scene, the time, the circumstances, the atmosphere, not only of the place, but of the people, suddenly surprised young Julian's heart into a more vivid and distinct longing to love and to be loved than had ever before troubled him. Perhaps he envied his friend. But yet, if he envied his friend, it was because he loved and was beloved, not because it was Alice whom he loved, and by whom he was loved. Nevertheless, he looked at Alice more often and with more attention than he had ever done before.

Thinking how immaculately pure was Alice's fairness, he occupied himself with wondering to what flower to liken her. Not to the lily, because the whiteness of

the lily, associated with such an overpowering wealth of fragrance, suggests a white heat of passion. Not so the snow-drop, though the snow-drop, in the meek innocence of its unsullied, unsunned, new-born expression (surely flower faces, as well as human faces, have expression), had more resemblance to Alice, but it was too wintry cold.

He looked at Alice so long, as he might have looked at a picture, that Alice's eyes, full of sweet serious thought, were drawn to his. Then the softest warm pink crept over the whiteness, her free hand stole up, in her gentle embarrassment, to push back her hair, which the coming and going of the faint breaths of the Summer evening lifted and ruffled into a little golden cloud on her forehead, and Julian decided that Alice was not like any one flower, but, as the spirit of Summer twilight, might be of the essence of all flowers.

Then Julian turned his devout observance once more towards Grace, thinking that in the woman he loved he would like something a little more mature, a little less ethereal, than Alice.

“Our Summers at Heatherstone are sadly short,” said Colonel Dacre, with something like a sigh. “This year is an exceptional one, for often we have it cold into June, and cold again in September. We must make the most of this warmth and beauty while it lasts.”

“Summers, everywhere, and of all sorts, are sadly short,” affirmed Julian. “We all of us, in all ways, need to make the most of them.”

“Ah! you happy young fellow, if they are as short for you as for me, you have, nevertheless, the prospect of—let us say a quarter of a century more of them.”

“No, no, no!” cried Julian. “Don’t

make me out such a mere boy, especially in the presence of Miss Dunn, who I have a sort of feeling considers youth a fault."

"An enviable one, of which the correction is inevitable," was Colonel Dacre's aside.

"What profound moralizing!" said Grace, speaking for the first time since they had seated themselves.

"You have been looking such a profoundly meditative muse, Miss Dunn, that I have not ventured to disturb you."

As Grace only acknowledged this remark by an almost imperceptible elevation of her chin, while she slightly averted her head, Julian was not encouraged to try to draw her into conversation. He turned to Olivia, and Grace thought him malicious, believed that he was studiously and subtly seeking to revenge himself and to wound her, when he said,

“I was just now, at dinner-time, going to ask you, Miss Dacre, when something intervened, if you know a Mr. Blatchford, more often called Tom Blatchford, who has lately been in this neighbourhood ?”

“We know him well ; we have known him since he was a boy. His family lived then in our neighbourhood ; since he lost father and mother he has been very unsettled, and has travelled a great deal.”

“He’s a glorious fellow, I should think ! I’m much disappointed to learn that he has just started for Norway ; I should like to have known more of him. Of course you have heard of his last exploit ?”

“It is impossible to say what may have been Tom’s last exploit,” said Olivia. “Do you, Grace, know to what Mr. Farquhar is likely to refer !”

“No, indeed, nor do I wish to know. I have no desire to hear more than I can

help of Mr. Blatchford's wild and discreditable adventures."

This bitter-toned speech made Julian pause a moment, then he said,

"Of course it is not for me to defend Mr. Blatchford, but I should have thought, from the little I have seen of him, that his adventures would not be discreditable, however wild."

"It is just possible, Mr. Farquhar, that your ideas and mine of what is discreditable might slightly differ."

Julian only bowed his head in gently deferential acknowledgment of these words; then he remained silent, lost in wonder as to how he had been so unfortunate as to offend this haughty princess. That the wrong must be his, could not be hers, he took for granted.

The subject would have dropped but for a question of Olivia's, who did not choose

to see Julian's gentleness thus abused.

"What I alluded to happened very lately," Julian answered; "I was told of it by a man named Sharpton, who is a profound admirer of Mr. Blatchford's. Mr. Blatchford was riding home from Sharpton's place down the river, when, close to a low, river-side public-house, he came upon a man and woman quarrelling desperately. The man dealt the woman a heavy blow just as Tom rode up. Tom—I beg his pardon—" (here Grace muttered some angry words which nobody caught), "Mr. Blatchford, immediately sprang off his horse, and, without waiting to see what became of it, attacked the man for his cowardly conduct in striking a woman. Upon which both man and woman set upon Mr. Blatchford. In the struggle that followed, the man fell into the water. Mr. Blatchford jumped in after him and pulled him out, so

quickly that he was only sobered by the shock ; then, having threatened to keep an eye on him, and to thrash him within an inch of his life if he ever again struck a woman, Mr. Blatchford re-mounted his horse, which had not strayed far, having found some sweet river-side grass to browse upon, and left them, good friends with each other, and abusing him."

"And that is your idea of an adventure in which there is nothing discreditable!" commented Grace.

"It certainly is!"

"I call it being disgracefully mixed up in a drunken brawl."

"I can hardly think you are serious, Miss Dunn?"

"I am always serious."

"Would you mind telling me," persisted Julian, with almost timid and very respectful inquiry, "to what part of Mr.

Blatchford's conduct you take exception? You wouldn't have had him let the man knock the woman about without interfering? You can't object to his having pulled the man out of the water when he fell in? What is it, then, that displeases you?"

Julian could not, if that had been his studious endeavour, have made himself more intensely, almost intolerably, disagreeable to Grace than he was doing. Grace prided herself upon being more logical, reasonable, and dispassionate than the majority of women, and Julian was stirring her into a state of illogical, unreasonable irritation. She did not believe in the sincerity of his extremely gentle and deferential manner; she thought he was taking his revenge for her slighting treatment, and trying to annoy her. After some seconds of struggle for self-mastery, Grace said,

"I deny your right to drag me into the



discussion of a distasteful subject, Mr. Farquhar," and so saying, rose majestically from her place among them and moved slowly away, descending with considerable stateliness, from terrace to terrace, towards the house.

Once in her own room, poor girl, she shed bitter tears.

Young Julian looked dejected and crest-fallen. He was at an age when young men encourage themselves to fall in love; and he believed himself to be, or to be about to be, in love with Grace.

"You must excuse Grace's pettishness," pleaded Olivia. "She and Mr. Blatchford have been playmates or lovers all their lives. They have quarrelled lately, and poor Grace is unhappy. I let you into our family secrets, you see, Mr. Farquhar."

"The engagement is broken, then?" asked Julian, who felt, or believed that he felt, as if he had received a blow.



“Only to be renewed again the first time they meet, as has happened before. They love each other too well for either to love anyone else.”

“What a pity,” commented Julian, rather sentimentally, “to plant the rosy path of youth and love with thorns!”

“Youth, at all events, is a thing only those who have lost rightly value,” said Colonel Dacre. “For example, here is Alice, to whom, if you wish to commend yourself, you should talk as if she had grey hair and wrinkles.”

Beguiled by the moonlight and the balmy dewless warmth, they sat on and on. By-and-by, after a village clock had struck eleven, the nightingales broke into a flood, a fury, of singing, and gave them a fresh temptation to linger.

Alice, all this evening, was very silent,

perhaps rather more silent even than usual.

"More fit to be his child than his wife," Julian could not help thinking. "Evidently she worships him, but will that worship change to love, or stand in the place of love, when she is older? And how can he hope to find the rest and the sympathy such a man desires from his wife in so slight a girl?"

At last they really moved, and began to go down towards the house. Julian walked first, guiding Olivia, whose hand rested on his shoulder, as they went down the steep paths, across which the moonlight threw confusing shadows. The sheen of that moonlight on Olivia's silken soft white hair, and its glitter on her bright, dark eyes, gave her more than ever of her inspired Sibyl look, but he knew her now to be full of tender, careful domesticities.

When they reached smooth level ways, and Olivia took her hand from its resting-place, Julian raised it to his lips and kissed it, saying, as he did so,

“ I have heard much of you, Miss Dacre, and have much wished to know you, and now I know you, you seem to me to be far, far beyond anything I have heard.”

“ I hope you have not the eye of guile and the tongue of wile, Mr. Farquhar !” Olivia answered laughingly, resisting her inclination to make him some much more loving answer. She would willingly have kissed that smooth forehead or down-shaded cheek of his !

The four entered the lamp-lit drawing-room through the open windows. It was empty. Julian noticed this regretfully, and said,

“ I should like to have tried to make my peace with Miss Dunn.”

"It is shockingly late, and no doubt Grace has gone to bed—where it is quite time Alice should go," commented Olivia.

Refreshments were standing on a side-table. Colonel Dacre tried to persuade Alice to sip a little wine, saying that she was pale, her hands cold—that he feared she had been out too long and too late. She was standing just under the full light of the lamp, as she put her lips to the wine to please Colonel Dacre, and smiled up into his face.

"The moonbeams have bleached Miss Fairfax, as they have done all the other flowers," said Julian, gallantly. "To-morrow's sunshine will, doubtless, bring back the delicate rose again."

Olivia took possession of Alice now; together they bade good night to Colonel Dacre and to Julian, and went away.

"I suppose," Julian said to Colonel

Dacre, with his sweet smile, "I am not required to seem not to see what I do see. I hope Miss Fairfax is not as delicate as she looks. Do you know," Julian went on, rather hesitatingly, "it seems to me as if to love Miss Fairfax must be something like loving a moonbeam, a lily, a dew-drop, or a fairy."

Colonel Dacre did not speak immediately. Julian had time to fear that he might have displeased or pained his friend. When he spoke it was with a peculiar, measured quietness.

"Alice is not to be known and understood at once. I sometimes suspect we none of us half know her yet. Nothing has happened to sound the depths of loyalty, bravery, and devotion in her young heart." He went on, in a different voice, a voice into which passion gradually came: "Ah! Julian, you are too young to feel

as I do the ineffable charm of youth. You can't understand the sort of envy and hunger of heart with which, if I would let myself, I should look on that smooth white forehead of yours, and that just down-darkened lip ; you can't understand the passionate energy with which, were it not for the restraints set upon such desires by religious faith, I could crave to know that I had a hundred years and more in which to enjoy the realization of hope that lies before me ; you can't understand the vivid, vibrating way in which I could cry, would I let myself, to the Lord, to let me tarry in this world which He has made so fair and so good."

Such words were to Julian as a revelation of the passionate nature of a man whom he would have been inclined to pronounce somewhat passionless.

"That I never had my youth when I

was young may plead my excuse now," he added quietly. "Now, when it would be more seemly, perhaps, that I should be content to enjoy it by deputy in my son—but then, you see, I have no son."

"But you yourself are in the very prime and full vigour of life."

"I do not always feel so."

When at last they were about to separate, Julian said,

"It is one of those nights when it seems more worth while to stay outside, and try to surprise the secrets of the flowers, than to shut oneself up for sleep within four walls."

"When 'one' is a poet, with health, and not much more than twenty years. But when 'one' is a quarter of a century perhaps more than that—and has a touch of rheumatism!"

The sentence was only finished by an

expressive shrug and a smile very loving, but slightly melancholy.

For Julian that short white Midsummer night had little sleep and little silence. The nightingales sang on till the full choir of blackbirds and thrushes overpowered them, as the moonlight was overpowered by the dawn.

CHAPTER IV.

SETTLING DOWN.

“A kind of weight hangs heavy at my heart;
My flagging soul flies under her own pitch.
. sure some ill approaches,
And some kind spirit knocks softly at my soul,
To tell me Fate’s at hand.”

JULIAN FARQUHAR had a secret over which he had hitherto been as shy as young girls used to be over the secret of a first love—he was writing a book. He had thought to put his work aside during the short time he had expected to be at Heatherstone, because, intending to ride over every day to Greythorpe, he knew he would not have more than enough time

left to enjoy the society of his friends. But his stay at Heatherstone was to be much longer than anyone had expected. He had not been there a week, when he returned from his daily visit to Mrs. Burmander with wonderful news. Olivia had that day authorized Julian to promise Mrs. Burmander that Alice should, if she wished, go immediately to stay with her.

“Not while Julian is with us,” Colonel Dacre had pleaded.

“It is just while Julian is with us that we can best spare her, and that Mrs. Burmander will be most glad of her,” was answered, in Olivia’s most authoritative tone.

But now to frustrate Olivia came this wonderful news from Greysthorpe. The General and Mrs. Burmander were going to start the very next day, if the weather favoured them, “alone together,” except for man and maid, on a driving tour, to

revisit the places where they had passed their honeymoon. The scheme was, of course, the General's. Mrs. Burmander had sufficiently revived, under the influence of the dry, elastic, moorland air, to lull the General's worst fears to sleep, and to prevent her doctor from absolutely forbidding the expedition, especially as her husband, without a word to anybody, had been having a carriage built and fitted up with every luxurious modern invention for making movement easy. The old gentleman had arranged even the day for starting, and that they should take Heatherstone on their route, to show themselves to their friends there, before he himself said, or allowed Mrs. Burmander to say, a word to Julian about their intention.

"I thought he seemed curiously anxious to get me out of the way, to send me here," Julian said to Olivia. "As to having me

with them, he won't hear of it. To have any third person, but most especially for that third person to be a 'big grown-up son,' would, he says, take all the romance out of the expedition. He is as gleeful as a boy about it all, and so proud of having kept his secret. He knew I should oppose him and remonstrate. And, indeed, I feel very anxious about the whole affair."

"Does Mrs. Burmander herself seem to dread it?" asked Olivia.

"It is difficult to judge, Miss Dacre. She never can bear to disappoint the General about anything. To her he is husband and child in one—she pets and humours him almost as much as she honours and loves him."

"I don't wonder, there is a great charm in his youthful-heartedness." But Olivia spoke rather absently. "And how long do they propose to be away?" she asked.

“The General talks of six weeks, or even more ; but of course everything will depend upon the way Nantie bears the travelling, and upon the weather.”

“And while they are away we may be sure of keeping you.”

Julian had just time to fancy that this was said more thoughtfully than cordially, when Colonel Dacre struck in, with warmest heartiness,

“Of course we may be sure of that, Olivia. I wish the boy to feel that this is home.”

“If I may stay, Miss Dacre, I will promise not to be much trouble,” Julian said, with his, as she always found it, irresistible expression, half-timid, half-audacious, and yet wholly loving and deferential.

“Trouble !” echoed Olivia, rousing herself. “What do you mean by talking to me of trouble ? As Walter’s friend, in

Walter's house, you must be welcome, even if you were not, as you are, welcome as flowers in May, for your own sake."

So said Olivia, very forcibly ; and, passing close to Julian, on her way out of the room, Olivia, as much to her brother's as to her own astonishment, pushed the hair off Julian's forehead, and touched it with her lips, just where she had noted a momentary pucker of pained wonder, as he had felt, almost before she was herself conscious of feeling, that this prospect of his much-prolonged stay at Heatherstone was, for some reason, not altogether acceptable to Miss Dacre.

A glow of grateful pleasure overspread Julian's face. His was a nature to which the love of pure and good women was peculiarly welcome, and he had not known the love of his mother ; he took and detained Miss Dacre's hand, but he said, looking up at her,

“I must go to London before long, Miss Dacre. I could quite easily go now, if, for any reason, this arrangement would be more convenient to you. I don’t pretend to say I would like to go; but that has nothing to do with it. I feel it beautiful here; and I don’t know when I have been so happy. If I may stay, I will settle down to my work, and won’t get into anybody’s path. But if you have any shadow of a reason why it will suit you better that I should not stay, why then, of course——”

“You not only may, but you must stay,” answered Olivia, and then Julian kissed and released the hand he had been holding.

But neither Julian nor Miss Dacre felt quite satisfied; there was some vague uneasy feeling left. Julian fell into meditative silence when Olivia was gone, which he presently broke by saying to Colonel Dacre,

“After all I think it might be better that I should pay my visit to London, which must be paid before long, as I want to consult books, and to buy books, only to be met with in London, while Greythorpe is empty. If Mrs. Burmander should come home worse I don’t know when I could get there.”

“Leave the future to take care of itself, Julian. I won’t spare you. I won’t have the full happiness of this perfect time maimed and spoiled. I want you here.”

Two days after this, for the next day which was to have been the day of departure proved showery, just about luncheon-time the Burmanders drove up to the Heatherstone portico. Everybody immediately went out to greet them. The General looked triumphant. Mrs. Burmander calm and happy.

“No, no, no; I won’t have Marian get

out, Dacre!" the General cried, as Colonel Dacre opened the carriage door and offered his arm.

"I have renewed my vow of obedience to my tyrant," smiled Mrs. Burmander. "This is our silver wedding-day."

There was then a chorus of exclamations and good wishes. The General said,

"That was to have been our secret. I meant to have been away from you all to-day! I won't let her get out, Dacre, it's no use offering your arm, and looking so seductive. She's so well packed in, pillows and all, though that boy, Julian there, thinks no one else can arrange them, that I won't have her move till we get to the end of the first stage. Things mightn't settle themselves as well again. She says she's quite as comfortable as on her couch at home. You did say so, didn't you, Marian?"

“Yes, Lawrence, and it’s quite true.”

“So you needn’t look so grave, grandfather Julian, you’re not the only boy that can do it, you see! I’ve planned it all admirably. The very easiest stages, the healthiest halting-places, the travelling always to be done just at her strongest times of the day. It’s all right, and couldn’t be better, could it, Marian?”

“No, indeed, dear. He has thought, and, I believe, dreamt, about it for weeks,” Mrs. Burmander said, affectionately, adding to Julian, “It is all so perfectly well arranged, and I am feeling so much stronger, that indeed, dear boy, there is no need that you should be anxious.”

They had not been ten minutes at Heatherstone before the General was in a fidget to be off.

“She’s not to be tired by any of you,” he said, “she’s all mine, to have all to myself.

Dacre, there is one thing you may give us, if you will, a bumper of champagne!"

It was immediately brought. The General insisted that everybody should drink to the success of their expedition, which was of course done with the heartiest cordiality. Mrs. Burmander leant from the carriage to say some confidential, low-spoken, reassuring words to Mr. Farquhar. She wished Alice "good-bye" very lovingly, and said she hoped for a visit from her on her return ; "if I am permitted to return," was added too softly to be heard by the General.

"If I'd have had anybody with us," said the General, "it should have been that nice quiet little girl."

Then they drove away. The General, standing up in the carriage, his grey hair floating in the wind, as he flourished his hat above his head, shouted that somebody

—that Miss Fairfax—was to throw a slipper after them. Olivia turned to Alice, Alice's foot was immediately taken out of its dainty little covering, which she picked up, and threw.

When the carriage was out of sight Julian ran to fetch the slipper. Alice was leaning on Colonel Dacre's arm. Looking at it with curious wonder, as he carried it, Julian gave it, not to Alice herself, but to Colonel Dacre. Alice was quick in taking it from the Colonel's hand, dropping it on the ground, and pushing her foot into it.

“The least one of your two knights could have done, Alice, should have been to kneel down and put it on for you,” said Colonel Dacre. “That is what Julian expected me to do, no doubt.”

“You could not. I was leaning on your arm. And I should have been grieved if you had.”

"It was my bounden duty," smiled Colonel Dacre, "but I was not quick enough."

"And I was not presumptuous enough," said Julian.

And now Mr. Farquhar "settled down" at Heatherstone. He had his manuscripts and his books of reference, of which, being a young writer, he possessed a considerable bulk, brought over from Greythorpe. He meant really to work, and hoped to make great way. He rose early, and worked till breakfast-time; after breakfast, and one hour of pleasant idleness, he worked till lunch. Of course Julian was intensely interested in his work. As he grew more and more at home at Heatherstone, and threw off his shyness, he sometimes talked about this work. In pleasant contrast, then, to Grace's studied contempt,

or, at the best, more or less civilly concealed indifference, shone Alice's sympathetically interested face.

If Colonel Dacre were present—Alice was as much braver in his presence as, in good old-fashioned times, young girls used to be in the presence of their mothers—Alice sometimes hazarded a remark, or a question. The first time she had done this the unconsciously arrogant young author had felt as much surprise as if the words had been spoken by a few-months-old baby. Some of his surprise had appeared in his face, and had brought a blush to hers, as she said, apologetically,

“Lonel has sometimes spoken to me about the same subject.”

Alice's blush was reflected on Julian's face—he blushing for his own rudeness in having brought that blush to hers. And these innocent blushes were noted by Olivia.

Quite without his own knowledge that he was doing so, Julian acquired a habit of studying "Colonel Dacre's Alice"—at first much as he might have studied a picture, in which he was always, as he looked, learning to see new, and, to careless eyes, hidden meanings; or as he might have listened to subtle and delicate music, which he at first pronounced to be mere soulless sweetness, but from which he found soul and sense outbreathe as he listened more intently.

And by-and-by, quite as unconsciously to himself, Julian learned to talk chiefly for Alice when Alice was present, watchful for that look of intense intelligence to shine from her eyes, while,

"on her mouth
A doubtful smile dwelt, like a clouded moon
In a still water."

One thing was not lost upon Julian.

He noticed that whatever might be occupying Alice—however much she might be interested by anything that was going forward—if something had to be done for Colonel Dacre, if he said anything, almost, or, so it seemed to Julian, if he only changed his position, or the expression of his face, all Alice's attention was his immediately.

“The most dutiful little lady-love a man could desire,” thought Julian.

This perhaps dangerous study of Alice, and speculation about Alice, might have occupied Julian still more, had it not been, not only for the earnestness of his work, but also because, out of the inexhaustible and irrepressible sweetness of his nature, and the humility which made him feel himself in the wrong when he was conscious of being disliked, he set himself to try and conquer Grace's hostility, and to put himself on a footing of pleasant and friendly intercourse with her.

The girl was evidently not happy. He would have been glad to be useful to her, even to amuse her. But the more amiable anxiety he showed to make himself agreeable, the greater seemed to be the cross-grained satisfaction of Grace in treating him rudely and unkindly. When Grace tried to excuse to herself conduct of which she could not help being secretly ashamed, she explained the irritation Julian's gentleness and chivalrous "serviceableness" caused her by saying that he caricatured and made ridiculous those charms, graciousnesses, and amenities of mind and of manner, the total absence of which in Mr. Blatchford she regretted a great deal more than she chose to own.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE MOOR.

“ His years are young, but his experience old ;
His head unmellowed, but his judgment ripe.”

THE afternoons, when the days were cool or cloudy, the evenings, if the afternoons had been too hot, were generally spent in riding to some point of view, or something in some way worth seeing in the neighbourhood, to which Colonel Dacre wished to introduce Julian.

Olivia was not often of the party. In spite of her cheery brightness of spirits (just now under some slight cloud), she liked a good deal of solitude, silence, and

stillness in her life, now that she was, as she said, "getting old." She was glad of these quiet times for reading, meditation, or for paying some charitable visit. So the party, except when some friend or neighbour joined it, generally consisted of only Grace and Julian, Alice and Colonel Dacre.

They were riding all four abreast one sultry July evening, on which they had not cared to go far, but had just climbed up on to the moor, in search of fresh air, when Julian, who for some time had been chiefly occupied with attentive watching of Colonel Dacre's horse, said,

"I more than ever dislike that animal you're on, Dacre. She has restless, untrustworthy eyes, eyes that seem vigilant to do her rider some mischief. I thought so when I saw her in the stables ; I think so still more, now I see her in action."

“ Why, Julian, you’re always finding fault with my horses. You abused my steady-going old favourite, and called him a hard-mouthed brute.—Certainly he did pull too much at my weak shoulder. Now you’re beginning to abuse this mare ! She’s the tenderest-mouthed thing I ever mounted, and her paces are something wonderful for soft elasticity. When I know her a little better, I mean Alice to ride her ; she’s just fit to carry such a light weight. With Alice upon her, she’d go like a bird.”

“ In spite of her beauty,—and she is a beauty,—I should be sorry to see any lady upon her. I never did think you a very good judge of a horse, Dacre.”

“ I know you never did. And yet my experience has been pretty large, and I’ve not had many accidents or mistakes.”

“But you never had any natural turn for horseflesh.”

“No gentleman has,” pronounced Grace.

“That is quite true in one sense, Miss Dunn, and yet, in another, it is just as true that almost every gentleman has.”

Grace merely turned her head aside, her manner of intimating that she did not think the subject worthy her further attention.

“To tell the truth, I had had some thought of putting Alice upon this mare to-morrow, if, on a thorough trial of her on turf, she behaved perfectly well,” said Colonel Dacre; “but you have made me nervous about doing so. She was sold to me as a marvel of docile gentleness, and I have seen nothing in her to contradict that character.”

“To hear that said of her, and to look at her eye, would sufficiently assure me

that the seller knew her to be something very different."

"You young cynic! I supposed the man I bought her of to be a gentleman."

"Anyway," said Julian, "you can't mind my mounting a horse on which you had thought of putting Miss Fairfax to-morrow. You have no right, with your weak shoulder, to try experiments. You should not allow it, Miss Fairfax." Julian spoke with affectionate peremptoriness. Alice smiled at the idea that she was "to allow" or "not to allow" Colonel Dacre to do this or that. "You won't mind changing with me now, will you? I have a fancy to try the creature here on the turf," was added to Colonel Dacre, persuasively.

"My confidence in your perfect horsemanship would stand a stronger test than that." As he spoke, Colonel Dacre, meaning before he dismounted to alter his

stirrup to Julian's length, Julian being rather the taller, threw his whip on the ground to have his hands free.

Whether this startled the mare, or whether she was, as Julian judged her to be, really vicious, and now saw a chance of mischief that would pass unpunished, the whip was no sooner out of Colonel Dacre's hand than the creature began a series of wildest pranks and maddest endeavours to unseat her rider. Buck-jumping first, when that did not answer, standing almost erect, fighting the air with her forefeet.

It all transacted itself in such a flash that Alice had not had time to lose her instinctive confidence that nothing in the way of harm would happen to Colonel Dacre—that he would be sure to “dominate the situation;” no time to lose this feeling, and to realize that he was in horrible danger (for the mare was just prepar-

ing to do what it afterwards did, when a groom was riding it, on which Colonel Dacre had it shot, throw itself backward), when Julian, who was a yard or so behind, whose horse was taller and perfectly-trained, pushed to Colonel Dacre's side, got hold of his rein, swung himself off his own horse, and by his weight hanging to her head pulled the mare down. The next instant Colonel Dacre was on his own feet, and the danger was past. Grace had screamed, just once. Alice had been quiet, but she was now, lips and cheeks, perfectly colourless, and conscious of the stealing over her of a deadly sort of sickness. As the old groom rode up and took the mare's head, Julian's right arm dropped helplessly to his side.

"That 'ood have been the death of 'ee, Colonel, but for Mr. Farquhar," the old man pronounced. "The brute needed a

good knock on the head, to bring her down and you'd nothing to give it her with. Another instant, and she'd have been over back'ards, and rolling on 'ee."

Colonel Dacre, muttering, "My God! if Alice had been riding her," changed colour. At that moment Grace called out to him, "Quick, Uncle Walter, and see to Alice." For Alice had fainted and was falling forward on her horse's neck. Colonel Dacre was just in time to prevent her falling further by taking her in his arms. When he had disengaged her from the saddle, and had laid her on the turf, well out of reach of all the horses, she came to herself almost directly. They neither of them said anything, but Alice took one of his hands in both hers, as he bent over her, and pressed her lips to it, as if she would never take them away again. Then, as she stood up, leaning on Colonel Dacre's

arm, she looked towards Julian. "He is hurt!" she cried immediately. "Oh! Lonel, Mr. Farquhar is hurt!"

"It is nothing, nothing," Julian hastened to say—"nothing, or something so little as to be nothing but a moment's hurt. A slight kick from that creature's hoof, perhaps, as she came down, or it may be a mere strain."

"Sit down, dear," Colonel Dacre said to Alice, taking her hand from his arm. Alice immediately obeyed him. He went to Julian, and tried to find out the extent to which he was hurt. But Julian made light of the whole thing, though it was easy to see that he was suffering acutely.

"I don't even know if it is my arm or my shoulder, a bruise or a strain. I am sure it can be nothing of any consequence. For the moment my arm feels helpless. Unfortunately it is my right arm. I re-

tract the word, 'unfortunately,'" he hastened to add, "heathen that I am to have used it. Instead of just merely thanking Heaven that I was of use to you."

"Of use to me! Humanly speaking, you saved my life. I am not as light or as lissom as I once was, as you are; it would have been only by a miracle that I could have escaped if she had thrown herself back with me."

They had moved, as they spoke, close to where Alice was sitting. She looked up into Julian's face, the beauty and the intensity of her expression, as she folded her hands together, without knowing that she did so, parted her lips, as if to speak, but said nothing, almost startled him. And yet she looked so child-like that he would have been pleased to put his hand upon her head, as he smiled down, with moistened eyes, a smile that was fond in its tender-

ness of recognition of what her look meant.

If Olivia had been there, she would have found much in that look, answered by that smile, to disquiet her. It was true, too, that after the exchange of that look and smile they could never again feel far apart, or strangers; but it was no less true that, in spite of their intensity, both look and smile were as free from all ordinary passion, from anything inconsistent with the most guileless loyalty and innocence, as if they had passed between two children, or two young girls.

“It is well we are only so short a distance from home,” said Colonel Dacre. “You cannot ride, Julian, because of your arm, and Alice had better not, lest she should feel faint again. I will at once ride home with Grace. I shall send for a surgeon, that we may know, to-night, how much or how little you are hurt. Watts

can do as he pleases about bringing the horses all home, or tying one up till he can send for it. (I should advise you, Watts, not to attempt to manage the three.) Alice says," he went on to Julian, "that she feels quite well again now, though she looks so pale. You and Alice had better, therefore, walk gently on. Be sure you don't hurry, go gently and softly. I shall try to have the surgeon at Heatherstone by the time you get there."

"I am sure there is nothing you need be anxious about. Will you have my sound arm, Miss Fairfax ?"

But Alice declined it. They went softly and silently over the turf, each going slowly for the sake of the other.

Colonel Dacre rode forward with Grace, followed by the groom leading Alice's horse, when he had securely fastened the offending mare to an old hawthorn. Of

course Alice was as far as possible from feeling that by one look she had thanked Julian enough. But she would need to find herself close to Colonel Dacre, her hand, perhaps, upon his arm, before she would venture upon any grateful words. Perhaps, too, some loyal instinct warned her that this hour of Summer twilight, when she was alone with Julian, was not the time to choose for any emotional outpouring.

Anyway, they went quite silently, side by side, till Julian, stumbling in the dusk, over the outstretched roots of some small bush he hadn't noticed, severely jarred his shoulder, and was provoked by the unexpectedness of the pain to a sudden exclamation.

Then Alice made a little pause, turned to him, and said in a distressed voice,
"I believe you are much more hurt than

you will let us know. I'm afraid you're suffering a great deal of pain."

"It was sharp for the moment. I was a fool to call out."

"If you would let me make a sling for you to put your arm into I don't think walking would hurt you so much."

"It was only the accidental stumble that hurt me so much. I'm rather short-sighted. I will be more careful. Besides, if I want a sling, what have you of which you could make one?"

"My veil is long enough; and it is quite strong enough to last till we get home."

"Indeed I won't have you spoil your pretty veil."

"As if it could be put to any so good use."

And Alice unwound the long scarf of silvery gauze from round her throat and round her hat. As she did so, she said,

“ It will be kind of you to let me do anything that I think may lessen your pain.”

“ You shall do anything you please. Now how are you going to manage? I must kneel to a fairy like you, Miss Fairfax, if you intend to fasten it round my neck.”

As he spoke he laughingly knelt down and removed his hat.

“ There was no need for that,” Alice answered, as she threw the extemporized sling over his head. “ For you could have put it on yourself!”

“ But I much prefer receiving my order of knighthood from this kind little hand to conferring it upon myself,” Julian answered gallantly. If Colonel Dacre had been there he would, perhaps, have kissed “ the kind little hand ” before he rose; as it was, he did not allow himself to do so.

They moved on again. After a few moments he declared his arm to be even so much

easier. She answered that she was very glad; and very little more than this passed between them during the hour it took them, at the slow pace at which they walked, to reach home.

It was one of those breathless, after Mid-summer, evenings, when the sober richness of sunset colour will linger long, with hardly perceptible change. Every bush on the opposite ridge of moor was darkly defined against the glowing background, and every little sound had a sharp distinctness in the sultry silence.

When they reached the house, the surgeon was waiting to examine Julian. Olivia took possession of Julian, hungering, by deeds, not words, to show her sense of what she felt she owed him. Her scissors cut his sleeve from wrist to shoulder; she applied the fomentations and prepared the bandages.

"It is difficult to understand how you could get so much hurt without being more hurt," the surgeon said. "It is a marvel that the bone is not smashed. The cure will, possibly, be tedious. You must consider it might have been your skull, and from that thought take patience."

"He has many a better thought than that to give him patience, Mr. Mostyn," observed Olivia, with a loving smile for Julian.

Julian's arm and shoulder were to be kept wet with linen steeped in iced water. Olivia would trust this duty to no one else that first night. In spite of her care the surgeon's morning report was not very favourable. There was more tendency to inflammation than he had expected. His patient had had little sleep, and was feverish. The sultry heat of the weather was against him.

“ You have some opportunity of learning the thorough, through and through, sweet-ness of Julian’s disposition,” Colonel Dacre said to Olivia. “ This interruption of his work is a considerable trial to him. And Mostyn says the pain is a good deal more, probably, than one would imagine ; yet you won’t hear a word, or see a look that betrays suffering or disappointment.”

“ His disposition is strangely like your own, Walter. I read somewhere the other day that Aristotle says—I think, at least, it was Aristotle—that friendship is composed of a single soul inhabiting two bodies —reading that, I thought directly of you and Julian.”

“ I see you mean to shut my mouth from praising Julian, by always turning my words against myself. And yet I don’t think you any more grudge him my praise. Never forget, Olivia, that what you hold so

very precious, my life, in all probability would have passed from you before now, if it had not been for young Julian."

This was said with an impressive significance which painfully affected Olivia.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW THEY SPOILED JULIAN.

“ And can you be so pitiful ? ”
“ So dutiful because you urge it, sir ? ”

“ **A**LICE ! Alice ! Where is Alice ? ”

This was Colonel Dacre’s call and question one stiflingly hot afternoon a week or two later. Alice was not to be found in the house, and no one seemed to have seen her for some time.

Colonel Dacre pursued his search in the grounds, and by-and-by came upon her. His step, noiseless upon the deep mossy turf at the foot of the great old walnut-tree, under which she was sitting, had not disturbed

or forewarned her, and it struck him that her expression was somewhat sad. An open book was on her knee, but she was gazing straight out in front of her. The green shadow of the leaves made her fairness look pale. When she knew he was close to her, her whole aspect and attitude changed; both had seemed slightly rigid; but when she looked up at him and smiled, she woke to soft and rose-hued life.

“Were you looking for me? Do you want me, Lonel?” she asked, with some slight soft eagerness.

“Do I not always want you, Alice?”

“Are you quite sure of that, now you have Mr. Farquhar.”

“I am quite sure of that, even though I have Mr. Farquhar.”

“But you wanted me now for something, perhaps, Lonel?”

“For this precious little something,

yourself," he answered, lightly laying his hand upon her shoulder.

She pressed her cheek down upon that hand, and smiled content, and questioned him no more.

"Isn't it pleasant here," she presently said softly. "Won't you stop here with me a little? I should like to ask you something about what I have been reading —to have one of those nice talks we haven't had for so long a time, not once since Mr. Farquhar came."

"Are you jealous of Mr. Farquhar, Alice?"

"Grace says I ought to be; perhaps I am, just a little." She smiled up into his face frankly. "You will stay a little while now, won't you?" was added persuasively.

This was temptation; that soft mossy turf by Alice's side, where he could lie,

holding her hand in his, and looking into that face which, for him, was the most exquisite thing in this world, invited him to yield to the petition of the wistful eyes. But he did not yield.

“ To tell the truth, Alice, I did want you ‘for something.’ I was seeking you with a petition. It will please me very much if you will come with me, instead of my staying with you. If you will join us, Olivia, Julian and me, in Julian’s study, and will help us to amuse him. He was saying just now that he has not seen you since the evening of his accident.”

“ I will, of course, do anything you like, Lonel; but, having you and Olivia, I don’t see how Mr. Farquhar can want me.”

“ You will be, at all events, a novelty, Alice !”

“ There is that to be said, certainly,” she answered, preparing to rise by shutting up her book.

"I don't think Julian is quite so well to-day," Colonel Dacre went on. "I know of nothing so sweet and so soothing as your cooing voice, my dove. If you will read to him or sing to him—— Do you dislike the thought of doing so?" he questioned, perplexed by the expression that overcast her face.

"If I do, I ought not, so please believe I don't," pleaded Alice. "It would indeed be ungrateful of me to dislike doing anything I can do for Mr. Farquhar, when I remember——" That sentence was only finished by a moistening of Alice's eyes.

Colonel Dacre stretched his hands out to help her to get up, and when she stood beside him, holding his arm, she added,

"It is only that I am so stupidly shy, I suppose. And that I can't fancy Mr. Farquhar can really care for anything I can do, when he has you and Olivia."

“Has the poor little thing been feeling itself neglected, and as if nobody wanted it?” was asked with smiling tenderness.

“I hope I was not quite so foolish; but, to tell the truth, I’m not quite sure. I have felt rather lonely and forlorn the last week or two: rather shut out and left to myself.”

With this answer—with the increased moistening of Alice’s eyes, the deepening of her blush, and the way her cheek was pressed against his shoulder, Colonel Dacre was anything but displeased.

“As you make confession, Alice, I will do the same,” he said, “and own that probably it is all selfishness that makes me want you to join us in Julian’s room—just that I don’t want to have to do without either of you.”

Alice’s smile was happy now, and as if smiled out of a free heart. They went to-

gether slowly, choosing the most shady ways to escape the intense power of the afternoon sun, towards the house. Julian's study faced the south-east ; it seemed dim and cool after the blazing heat just outside the hall door. Julian was lying on a couch in the window, dressed, because he could not yet move his arm enough to get it in and out of a coat-sleeve, in a loose white Indian dressing-gown, which seemed to throw a white light upon his pale face. Olivia sat near him, knitting ; she seldom had unemployed fingers. Julian, watching her, was thinking over the last thing they had spoken about, and, at the same time, was studying the peculiar effect of the green reflections, from sun-illuminated grass and tree outside, upon her silver-white hair. Julian never tired of studying Olivia ; every changing expression, and every gesture of hers, seemed to

have for him some peculiar interest.

One day, after they had become very affectionately intimate, Julian said to her, in a suppressed voice,

“I try to dare think, Miss Dacre, that my mother, of whom I have no memory, may have been something like you.”

“Your grandmother, you should rather say,” had been her laughing answer.

Julian, as he now watched Olivia, presently saw a surprised—by no means a pleased—look come into her face, as, at the opening of the door, she looked past him, and saw who entered. He turned his head, of course, to find out whom this look greeted; then, either from surprise, pleasure, or, perhaps, because of some interpretation of his own put upon Olivia’s look, he flushed feverishly. Olivia noted the flush. Julian wondered whether Alice had really changed; if not, why he had

not admired her more before. It seemed to him that now, as she came towards him, her hand still on Colonel Dacre's arm, there was a quiet nobility and gracious womanliness about her which he had thought her quite wanting in before ; and she looked wonderfully lovely. Colonel Dacre brought her up to him, as he might have brought anything else very precious to himself, with an air of happy generosity, in nothing ignorant of the value of what it gives, but because of that value the more happy in giving.

“ You two have not met since that memorable evening,” he said ; “ and on that evening, Alice tells me, she did not even try to thank you for what you did for her in saving me.”

“ And I am not going to try now,” Alice interposed, more quickly than she usually spoke. “ I know it is not a thing for which

Mr. Farquhar would like anyone to thank him, because——”

But here Alice came to a pause, and the soft flush deepened on her face. Her hand was in Julian's; he had forgotten to release it, marvelling at her extreme beauty, and waiting to hear what she might be going to say. Her blush reminded him to let her hand free.

“What is the ‘because?’” questioned Colonel Dacre.

Alice lifted her sweet eyes to his face, as if she found it easier to speak so, to him.

“The ‘because’ is that you are, I know, so dear to Mr. Farquhar that he might feel it a mockery, almost an impertinence, to be thanked for having saved your life.”

“That is well felt, Alice,” commented Colonel Dacre, proud and pleased; “but—”

“But,” interrupted Julian, “the fact that in saving him from danger I served

you, Miss Fairfax, may well have given what I did an added sweetness."

"It seems to me high time," spoke Colonel Dacre, "that you two dear children should leave off being 'Miss Fairfax' and 'Mr. Farquhar,' one for the other. It would sound far pleasanter and more natural to hear you call each other 'Alice' and 'Julian.'"

"They are not children, Walter, and it is absurd to talk as if they were."

Those words of Miss Dacre's were spoken with such a harshly vibrating voice, so out of harmony with the mood of the others, that their effect was startling. Miss Dacre's eyes, too, had an angry light in them.

Colonel Dacre looked at her displeasedly.

"It is true, Olivia, that they are not children," he said, "but they are the two who, yourself excepted to be set between

them, are my dearest of all the world. Besides this, after what happened the other evening, what one did and what the other felt, they should have, inevitably, an affectionate friendship for each other that would make the use of the formal 'Mr.' and 'Miss' between them an absurdity even greater than I was guilty of when I called them children."

Olivia, after a moment's silence and inward conflict, said humbly, and it seemed to them sadly also,

" You are quite right, brother, as you always are."

On which Colonel Dacre, looking at her very lovingly, kissed her hand, and there was peace. But it was not immediately that Alice and Julian complied with Colonel Dacre's wish, and called each other 'Alice' and 'Julian.' They effected an unconscious compromise by avoiding the use of

any name in addressing each other. And yet neither of them ever had any difficulty in knowing when Julian or Alice was spoken to by Alice or Julian. The first time Alice called him Julian, Julian was startled to find himself thinking that no man had ever before had so musical-sounding a name.

When Julian was downstairs and among them all again, looking white and delicate and, with his arm in a sling, altogether, as Grace expressed it, more "dreadfully interesting" than ever, even sensible and unimpressionable Grace couldn't help doing her part towards spoiling him. If she found herself alone with him, so that there was no one else to give him any assistance, she couldn't help being watchfully alert in his service. In fact, Julian was treated by the whole household as a young Prince, even more loved than honoured, might be

treated by subjects and courtiers. The servants disputed among themselves for the doing of anything they could do for him. There was one flaw in his happiness. Being so young, having, in all probability, a long life before him, Julian was naturally impatient of delays and hindrances in the execution of the work he desired to do, and Mr. Mostyn told him it might be weeks yet before he could use his pen.

On hearing this, Colonel Dacre, who seemed to be always seeking about in his mind for fresh ways to please and to indulge Julian, said,

“But surely, if you are strong and well enough in yourself, as people say, to work, you could get on with an amanuensis! I wonder we haven’t any of us thought of this before! I’m afraid it’s not much use my offering my services——”

“Considering you yourself are often

puzzled to read your own writing, I should think not," answered Julian, laughingly.

"Alice is my only admirer in respect to my hand-writing," Colonel Dacre said. "She considers that it is both easy to read and good to look at. But we will find some one to write for you. For Olivia's hand, I can only say it is too like my own. And, besides, she is always in so much request, I don't know at what part of the day she could be sure of being uninterrupted for an hour."

"Grace, you write a very good and very legible hand," said Miss Dacre. "You must be Mr. Farquhar's amanuensis."

Olivia spoke quickly and decidedly.

"Indeed, Aunt Olivia, I can't possibly spare the time. I have so much to do just now at the schools; and, besides——"

"I could not think of trespassing upon your time, Miss Dunn. I will just wait.

It will be good for me to have my patience exercised just now in regard to a thing I am disposed to be impatient about."

"I am ashamed of you, Grace," spoke Olivia, hotly. "It's too hard, considering what we all owe to Mr. Farquhar, that you should grudge him an hour or two of your time."

"Don't be too severe, Olivia. Grace is thinking more of a reason she doesn't, than of the one she does give. That is—what would Tom Blatchford say?"

"There is Alice," said Grace, "why can't Alice do it? Alice has nothing particular to do of any kind. And Alice writes——"

"The prettiest and the clearest hand of us all," interrupted Colonel Dacre. "Well thought of, Grace. Though I demur to your statement that Alice has nothing particular to do of any kind. If all the gracious and charitable doings of Alice's

day were to be left undone, I don't know which among us wouldn't feel the difference! But I am quite sure Alice will gladly make time to help you, Julian."

"I will not hear of it. I couldn't think of it. It is very good of you to offer it, and of her to be willing, as I know she always is for any kindness, to fulfil your offer, but I could not think of troubling her." Julian spoke hurriedly.

"Alice would neither feel, nor fancy, nor find it any trouble," persisted Colonel Dacre, and his eyes claimed from Alice some confirmation of his words.

"That is quite true," Alice assented. "I have plenty of time, and it will please me very much if I can be of use to you. Do let me try!"

Olivia's heart, for once in her life, felt hot and angry against her darling, on whom Colonel Dacre beamed one of his sunniest,

most approving looks, before turning to Julian ; then he said,

“ You can’t resist such sweet and such sincere pleading.”

“ But indeed I feel I ought to resist it. And I feel that Miss Dacre thinks I ought.”

Olivia hesitated. Her brother’s eyes were fastened on her now, controllingly, as well as Julian’s, inquiringly. She tried to speak carelessly, saying,

“ I don’t think it will be good for Alice to be sitting, and stooping as she does when she writes, long enough to be any use to Julian.”

“ And I am sure Miss Fairfax has no idea of the troublesomeness of what she is so good as to be willing to undertake—not that I mean that I think she would be deterred by that,” Julian added, in rather an embarrassed manner.

“ Alice is not one to shrink from a little

or a good deal of troublesomeness. I should like you to-morrow to make the attempt of letting her write to your dictation. If it answers, you can repeat the experiment ; if not, no harm is done."

Colonel Dacre said this in a manner that prevented any further controversy on the subject.

Julian looked forward to the morning with pleasant and yet uneasy excitement. He had some troublesome consciousness, or conscientiousness, which found Miss Dacre's disapproval of the scheme not unreasonable. But yet the temptation, so pressed upon him by Colonel Dacre—a two-fold temptation, appealing to the young author's impatience to be at work, and to something less strong, as yet, but sweeter and more subtle—was too powerful to be resisted.

For the first time in her life Miss Dacre

was feeling, just now, that she did not understand, could not approve, was not in harmony with, this beloved brother of hers. She seemed, also, to be dimly conscious of some change going on in him. She fancied that there was sometimes a slightly feverish and forced excitement about him, and an irritability (shown only towards herself, and, doubtless, only to be perceived by such love-quickenèd eyes as hers) strongly in contrast, however slight in itself, with the usual calm sweetness of a temperament which had made her think always of him when she read the words of an Arabian poet about his hero—

“ Sunshine was he
In the Winter day ;
And in the Midsummer
Coolness and shade.”

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE LIBRARY.

“O Menschenherz, was ist dein Glück ?
Ein rätselhaft geborner,
Und, kaum begrüßt, verlorner,
Unwiederholter Augenblick !”

WITH his own hands Colonel Dacre moved Julian's books and papers from the study, where he had worked before his arm got disabled, to the library, where he was now to let Alice work with him and for him.

The library at Heatherstone was the most beautiful room in the house. Its lofty roof was of richly-carved oak, as were its panelled walls, and the book-cases by

which they were nearly hidden. Its hangings and furniture were all dimly rich. Altogether the warm harmony of subdued colour pervading the room was that of Autumn woods, not when in full gorgeousness, not under brilliant noonday sunshine, but when under a softly-clouded sky, or when slightly veiled by falling twilight.

No new thing, with but one exception, in the way of upholstery, had been brought into this room for many a long year. The carpet was of a kind to outlast more than one generation, and the heaviest step fell upon it noiseless as upon soft deep moss.

The room had three large mullioned windows, the arched tops of which were, like the windows of the corridor upstairs, of old stained glass that had probably served in some ancient church or abbey before one of the Dacres had made use of it here.

The completeness of the room as a picture was much spoiled by what, for practical use, was an added charm—a large door-window at one end, opening on to the south terrace, just opposite to where a balustraded flight of steps led down into the rose-garden. Near this window was placed a luxurious little low chair for Alice, the only modern thing in the room. Alice often sat here when Colonel Dacre was busy writing at the table close by, from which he could look up and see her. Colonel Dacre liked to fancy Alice always sitting there, with sunshine falling round her, and that beautiful background. When Alice was not in the room, and when the Colonel was more gravely occupied than usual, the door-window would be shut, and a heavy curtain of faded crimson velvet drawn across it.

On the morning when Julian was to be

established here, with Alice as his secretary, that window, standing open wide, let in the mellow-glowing end of Summer, with browning tree-tops warm against a stainless sky, let in the cawing of rooks, the cooing of wood-pigeons, the distant-sea-suggesting murmur of the sun-steeped pines, the sunny scents of sunburnt late roses, of jasmine, of clematis, of musk, and mignonette.

“What a room this is!” Julian exclaimed admiringly to Colonel Dacre, who was installing him.

“If you like, Julian, you shall have the key, so that when you leave off work, you can lock the door, and know your properties are safe from disturbance.”

“Indeed, I’m not going to monopolize your particular kingdom in that way! An empty drawer to push my papers into is all I want.”

“These are all empty—I cleared them for you last night.”

“It won’t succeed, I’m sure, Dacre,” Julian said, with a touch of something rather like petulance in his voice. “I’m going to make the attempt to gratify you, but I know it won’t succeed. I never dictated a line in my life, and a young lady is not the sort of secretary one can use as a mere machine and think nothing about. The idea of the trouble I’m giving her, and the way I’m engrossing her, will be quite enough to check all freedom of thought.”

“If you find it so, of course there the matter ends,” answered Colonel Dacre; “but I prophesy that it will succeed so well that what is begun to please me, will be continued to please yourself—your authorship’s self. Alice’s interest in the subject

will help you not to fear that you are boring her."

Having surrounded Julian with everything he could think of that he was likely to want—having arranged a chair, a desk, a footstool for Alice, Colonel Dacre said,

"And now I will fetch the little lady herself."

At that moment Julian was seized with an impulse towards further remonstrance, such remonstrance as must be final. But he checked the impulse, pronouncing the feeling which had dictated it to be absurd, perhaps worse than absurd—cowardly and unworthy. But, during the few nervous minutes of waiting for Alice—why they were nervous minutes he did not feel quite sure—he experienced a kind of vexation against Colonel Dacre, for the first time in his life, for his—what? He could have

tried many epithets, and would have rejected them all. Stupidity, generosity, simplicity, folly, blind trustfulness of his friend, arrogant self-confidence and security.

Had Julian's love for Colonel Dacre been of a less reverent kind, it certainly would have been the less reverent of these epithets which Julian, just then, would mentally have applied to his conduct.

When Alice was brought into the room, Julian said to her,

"We both act this morning in obedience to our beneficent tyrant, but this will be the last, as well as the first, tax of this kind I make upon your patience. I am sure I shall not be able to work till I can write with my own hand. I shall be much too conscious of your trouble to be able to concentrate my thoughts."

"That will be paying me the very bad compliment of not believing in my sincerity

when I say I shall feel it no trouble," Alice answered, as she sat down, and began, in a business-like fashion, to occupy herself with pens, ink, and paper.

"There is one stipulation I should like to make, Julian," Colonel Dacre said—"that Alice's manuscript should not go into the hands of the printers."

"Every word she writes for me, if she writes at all for me, shall be re-copied."

"Have either of you any commissions? I am going to ride over to Monkstowe this morning, to attend a meeting."

Alice looked up quickly, rather apprehensively. "I thought—" she began, and then she paused.

"What did you think, Alice?" asked Colonel Dacre.

Alice blushed a little, because what she had been going to say—"I thought you meant to stay with us,"—seeming too

childish to be said, she substituted for those words others, saying,

“I thought you meant to let me ride to Monkstowe with you this afternoon.”

“When I spoke of that, dear, I had forgotten this morning’s meeting. But we can find a pleasanter ride for this afternoon than to Monkstowe, Alice. The valley-roads are hot, and deep in dust. A canter on the turf will be much pleasanter.”

Alice’s picture to herself of how the morning was to be passed had shown her Colonel Dacre at his usual place, occupied with his correspondence, while she wrote for Julian at some other part of the room; the room being large enough to admit of this without any necessary disturbance by Julian of Colonel Dacre.

But Alice was too much ashamed of the “childishness” of such shyness as made her cling in this way to the protection of

Colonel Dacre's presence, voluntarily to say anything which should betray it; nor did she show anything of it in her manner, which was simple, grave, and contained. A few more minutes, a few more words, and then Colonel Dacre left them, to begin their work.

Julian proceeded to busy himself with notes and note-books, and other books, turning them over with his left hand, as best he could. Alice quietly waited, wishing to help, not knowing how to do it, till presently noticing the worried, distressed look of Julian's young face, she suggested, "Perhaps you are not yet well enough for work?"

"It isn't that," answered Julian, leaning back in his chair, and lightly passing his handkerchief over his forehead; "but I can see it's no good to try to go on till I've the use of both my hands. I need to

be continually hunting up quotations, turning over books of reference, consulting dictionaries, looking back at what I've already written—in short, thank you very much for your kind wish to help me—pray don't think I'm ungrateful, but I find I can't be helped."

Alice felt herself dismissed—whether most relieved or reluctant to be so she could not have told; but after a moment's hesitation she rallied loyally, saying,

"But Lonel will be so disappointed;" she proceeded to plead, "Tell me what to look for, what you want found, what you want done. Let me bring the books you want, and find the places in them for you. I could help you in that way. We had better try not to disappoint Lonel. Don't you think so?" she questioned, responding to a smile of Julian's, which she did not understand, which meant something of

admiration, almost fond, of her, and something of envy of Colonel Dacre.

“Indeed I do! I will try to learn a little of your patience,” affirmed Julian. Then, to please her, he began to explain what the doubt or difficulty which had stopped him had been, and told her in which book, and under what heading, it was most probable she would find anything on the subject. After about half-an-hour of patient and intelligent search, Alice had hunted out for him what he wanted. He spent another half-an-hour in reviewing what he had last written, and after that he got up, began to walk to and fro in the room, and by and by, at last, proceeded to dictate.

Then things began to go smoothly. Julian left off being apologetic and ceremonious, and ceased to feel ill-at-ease. The getting to work again did him good. He

brightened up more and more. In leaving off being apologetic and ceremonious, he did not leave off being carefully anxious not to overtire Alice ; that carefulness coming out of a sweet-blooded courtesy of consideration for others which was too much a part of himself to be forgotten or remembered in proportion to the more or less of his interest in something else. But Alice assured him, with a face of such bright earnestness that he could not do otherwise than allow himself the pleasure of believing her, that she was much too interested to be easily tired. Once she asked some question about some passage she was writing, which made Julian pause a moment in surprise before he said,

“ Why, you will be my critic as well as my secretary ! Please put a large mark of interrogation on the margin of that page. I must look into that.”

When Colonel Dacre returned from Monkstowe, three hours after he had left them, Alice was still writing, Julian still dictating. Alice's fair face was softly flushed. Julian looked particularly animated and happy.

"I have a guilty consciousness that I have been exorbitant!" Julian exclaimed, when Colonel Dacre came into the room. "But it was a good long while before we made any beginning. Had it not been for some one else's sweet wise patience, no beginning would have been made at all. But, thanks to that, I have got on quite astonishingly well. You will confess you are tired now?" he added, looking at Alice with affectionate and somewhat patronizing probation.

"No, indeed, not tired; but no doubt it is time to leave off. It is so very interesting!" she said, looking up into Colonel

Dacre's face ; on which she immediately exclaimed pityingly—" It is you, Lonel, who are tired."

" A little ; the morning was close and sultry in the valley."

" And," she questioned, " is that all ? Hasn't something happened to pain or to worry you ?"

" What could happen on a ride to Monkstowe and back to pain or to worry me ?"

As he said this, smiling down into her face, the expression she had been struck by —of harass or of pain, either mental or physical—vanished.

" Come out with me for a few minutes' fresh air before lunch," he went on ; " there is a pleasant little breeze stirring in the lime-walk. It went to my heart to notice just now how the lime-trees are changing, yellowing, already."

“Already!” echoed Julian. “There never was so short a Summer!”

“Just my thought,” assented Colonel Dacre, as he helped Julian to put away his books and papers. “But we needn’t count the Summer gone for the yellowing of a few lime-leaves, or the browning of a few beech-leaves. The long drought will make the tints change early.” To himself he added—“Nor need I, for the melancholy echoing of those words of Olivia’s last night, count this Summer, which is nearly gone, as my last Summer.”

They—that is, he and Alice—passed out on to the sunny terrace. Colonel Dacre took Alice’s hand, drew it through his arm, and held it against his heart with something more like passionateness than was at all usual to him. Not that there was not passion in his nature, deep wells, from which hardly a drop had been drawn, but

that he was always so strictly under his own soldierly discipline and control.

Julian looked after them somewhat wistfully. He had thought of darting after them to take Alice her hat or sunshade, but the sunny head, which had seemed to him to attract too much of the sunshine, soon passed into cool shadow; and, after monopolizing Alice all the morning, Julian thought he would not follow her now; but, looking after them, he touched Alice with more tenderly-appreciative judgment than he had done yet.

Alice talked a little more than was her custom, and did not at first notice that Colonel Dacre talked somewhat less than was his wont. Alice told him what she had been writing for Julian, repeated how interesting it was, assured him how glad she was to be useful to Julian, and most innocently showed that she was in a little flut-

ter of pleasant excitement. But presently Alice became aware of some slight difference from his ordinary manner in her companion. Checking her unusual talkativeness, she questioned him of his ride, of what he had done, whom he had seen, what had happened.

“I am trying to find out what it is, besides the weather, that has tired you so badly, Lonel.”

“You are fanciful about me this morning, sweet,” was his answer, spoken with his usual caressing tenderness of manner.

When they all met for lunch, in the pleasantly-shaded dining-room, he had thoroughly cleared up; even Olivia did not detect any trace of the languor which had struck Alice. After lunch Alice asked if she should dress for riding, or if Colonel Dacre were not too tired to ride again.

“I am not by any means too tired, but

I have been thinking that Julian, who cannot ride, ought to have some of the fine moorland air this afternoon. How shall we manage that?"

"I'm quite equal to climbing up on to the moor on my own feet," asserted Julian.

"If you tried, you would, I expect, find yourself mistaken. Grace, what do you mean to do this afternoon?"

Grace, suspecting that she was about to be asked to drive Julian, made haste to say,

"I should like a ride, uncle, but I don't care to drive. I have been too busy to ride during the last week or two. This is one of my few leisure afternoons, and I feel as if a ride would do me good."

"Then we will all four go out together. I will ride with Grace, as she is bent on riding; and you, Alice, will, I know, drive Julian. Old Snowball, in Olivia's little

phaeton, will take you about on the turf safely and pleasantly."

It was so arranged, in spite of some wistful appeal against this arrangement *in* Alice's eyes. Miss Dacre, who had an invalid friend staying with her, was sitting with this lady on a part of the south terrace, to which had already reached the shadow of a great cedar, growing at its western end, when the party started. Olivia gazed after all that was dearest to her in the world with a passionate yearning and sadness over her face. Alice looked back, and, noting Olivia's expression, did not feel easy till her arms had been round Olivia's neck, and some fond words had been spoken between them. Olivia's friend was softly purring out,

"It would be difficult to imagine a prettier pair, or one better matched, than your Alice and that young Mr. Farquhar."

“Why, Martha, what are you talking about?” Miss Dacre said, so sharply as to startle her friend. “There is nothing of that kind between Alice and Julian, and no more chance of it than if Alice were already married.”

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

